

THE

Hudson



REVIEW

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD:

Hardy's Winter Words

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN:

In Pursuit of the Angel—a long poem

BARBARA REID:

The Waltz Dream—a story

GUY DAVENPORT:

The Champollion of Table Manners

JOHN SIMON:

The Elephant Man

Poems by JUDITH HEMSCHMEYER,

ILLY GROSHOLZ, LEWIS TURCO, PATRICIA SHEPPARD.

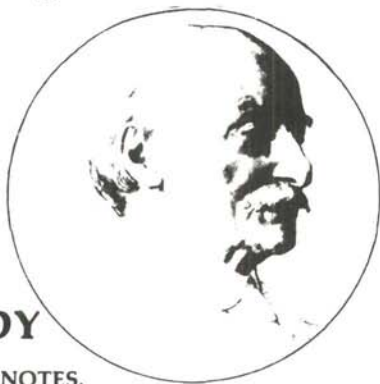
ronicles by VERNON YOUNG AND MARCIA B. SIEGEL.

views by RICHMOND LATTIMORE,

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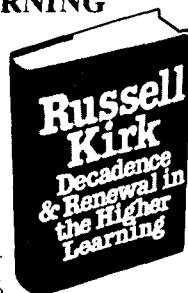


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Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors,

Mr. Perez' review of Terence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Spring 1979) raises many more questions than I can hope to ask in brief. Here are the salient ones.

Perez quotes *himself*, first dubiously, then with renewed confidence: "films are not primarily a visual medium"—which makes no sense to me, whatever. If film is not *primarily* a visual medium, what on earth is it? It is not primarily *aural* or *verbal* or *olfactory* (only sometimes). Thereafter, in any case, Perez bears down weightily on the *pictorial* makeup of Malick's movie (the cinematography is impressive, in its Thomas Hardy fashion), attributing to Malick's compositions all manner of ingenuity while providing a simplistic, Marxist interpretation which is in fact gratuitous, since the film is quite obviously an exercise, faltering though it may be, in the Soviet-Marxist line of "capitalistic contradictions."

This bias enables Perez to expound a mystique of movie editing which almost solely emphasizes a crude Hegelianism of opposites: city and prairie, slavery and freedom, promise and loss, encirclement and latitude, the mill and the train; all of which is *déjà lu* from the textbooks of Eisenstein and Pudovkin. Most of the time Perez is simply exclaiming with forced wonder at some of the normal and least subtle methods of introducing visual diversity and change of narrative pace. He specifies a "lovely shot of a train crossing a high bridge" and asks why the image is so beautiful. The short answer is: because being seen, it pleases. Perez goes on to describe what came *before* and *after*: such an explanation can't tell you why the shot is *beautiful*, only how it functions in the story line. Further on, he notes that the film is composed of "mostly brief . . . scenes that elicit a continuously shifting response," as if this were an esoteric invention of Malick and not what movie form is all about.

His climax to this self-evident mode of evaluation (on page 100) is his desperate statement that "Malick's interruptive cutting and restlessly mobile camera . . . suggest the makeshift quality of human arrangements, the lack of any secure foundation for human aspirations." But surely Perez has been laboring (and continues to labor) with the premise that the human arrangements in the film are *not* makeshift; they are determined, they are circumscribed by money and power interests, first in the factory (where workers were "unremittingly brutalized"), then in the field—rich against poor, plutocrats riding the under-dog; "Bill, Linda and Abby as representative of the down-trodden working classes." Yet now we learn that the film "gradually develops into a personal story [it wasn't from the outset?] . . . rather as if a novel by Zola turned into one by Henry James." If this is the case, why had Perez earlier expressed surprise at the perplexity experienced not only by other unnamed viewers

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but also by the actors in the film? Perez blunders on. "This is an unpsychological Henry James, however, who refuses to analyze the characters too closely. . . ." If James had ever refused to analyze his characters, he wouldn't have been Henry James as we know him! To introduce James at all into this context is a palpable absurdity.

On page 102: a hired hand looks up at the prosperous farmer's bedroom on the wedding night and the shot, says Perez, is "from the generalized point of view of the poor looking up at the rich." What in Heaven's name is a generalized point of view? Perez can't see anything in itself, it is forever representative or generic! If a *wealthy* neighbor had strolled by and stared enviously at the top-floor bedroom window, the shot would have logically been taken from the same perspective. What would Perez have then remarked? That it was from the generalized point of view of the concupiscent?

On the parenthetical subject of Malick's *Badlands* (page 101), I'll assert categorically that Perez is *wrong* and that his efforts to explain Malick's "attitude," or lack of it, towards his characters by comparing with it, negatively, that of Ray and Altman in other films, is simply wild. "In *Badlands* Malick neither romanticizes the young couple (as, for example, Nicholas Ray does in . . . *They Live By Night*) nor condescends to them (as Robert Altman does in his diffuse remake of Ray's film . . .): instead he respects the teen-age romance for the authentic feeling it arouses in the characters without inflating it into a grand passion or in any way softening its murderous consequences."

His whole discussion here is a tissue of incomprehension. Ray sympathized with *his* couple because he interpreted them as victims of the irony of circumstance. Is this to *romanticize*? Altman's script—not a "diffuse remake" of Ray's version but another approach altogether—is closer to the acrid tone of the novel by Sanderson, *Thieves Like Us*, and takes a harsher view of the felons involved. Why is this *condescending*? If criminals are in a given instance dramatized as misguided strays or in another as mad dogs, why is either view sentimental or condescending without further scrutiny of the instance? In *Badlands* the fugitive pair *do not have* "authentic feelings"! This is made very clear: the young man is a psychopath; the girl is a dim-witted provincial sucked into his murderous ambit because her head is filled with third-rate literary clichés, *of the kind which Perez quotes as being authentic*. If he can't see that Malick treated his characters *sardonically*, he missed the whole point of the film.

Returning to *Days of Heaven*, Perez conceals the venal motive of his "downtrodden" lovers vis-à-vis the rich farmer they hope to exploit, neutralizes the killing of Bill by the police (he *had* committed murder, justifiably or not) and fails to cite the bogus conclusion when the remaining girls, back in town (Chicago, was it?), set themselves up as prostitutes. That in 1916 America the only recourse of an unemployed female was to become a whore is an invention we'd expect from a *Pravda* edition of American history.

In an effort to defend this mendacious, over-blown film, Perez has merely exposed it as hokum, expressing his approval of hokum by con-

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triving for it a dialectic as fraudulent as that supplied by the undying defenders of Alfred Hitchcock and John Ford.

VERNON YOUNG

New York City

Mr. Perez replies:

This edition of *Pravda* came out only in Mr. Young's head: the simplistic misconstructions are his own, imposed by him on the film and on my review. To start with a point of fact: in *Days of Heaven*, contrary to what Mr. Young asserts in his unyielding categorical manner, Abby and Linda do *not* set themselves up as prostitutes in town. The film ends, as I said in my review, with the two going their separate ways toward uncertain destinations. In the case of Abby, I'll grant that there is a hint, when she takes a train full of soldiers, that she may become a camp follower; but where did Mr. Young get the idea that the scarcely pubescent Linda has become a prostitute? Could he, perhaps dozing off at a film he disliked, have mistaken for a whorehouse the boarding school in town at which, before escaping, Linda briefly stays? Out of a hint in one case, he makes a settled certainty in the case of both characters, imputes this to the doctrinaire determinism he sees in the film, and accuses me of misleadingly concealing the "bogus conclusion" he has fabricated.

What I said on page 102 is *not* that a hired hand looks up at the bedroom window on the rich farmer's wedding night; nor is this what happens in the scene. The camera angle from below is such that, as I wrote, the shot of the upstairs window "feels as if it were through someone's eyes—but nobody is shown looking." It's because nobody is shown looking that I maintained that the shot gives us a "generalized point of view": we get a sense of an individual's perspective without that perspective being attributed to any specified individual, and in a context in which whoever may be looking is almost certain to be a farmhand. If the farmer lived in an area populated almost exclusively by wealthy voyeurs, it would be another matter.

With a generalized point of view I was proposing a paradoxical notion, and Mr. Young seems to be doggedly literal-minded. He doesn't understand that I quoted a statement from the girl in *Badlands* in the ambivalent way in which, I believe, the film presents it: both as an instance of a romantic cliché and as an indication of her nonetheless authentic feelings. Films *are* visual! he stridently sets me straight. Henry James *was* psychological! Perhaps I failed to make myself quite clear. It wasn't my intention to suggest that films engage the audience mainly through senses other than the eye, but that they achieve their effect mainly through means other than the pictorial—such as those of narrative and drama. And I meant to point out that *Days of Heaven* develops into a personal story which, in its basic outline, resembles something from James—as in-

deed it does, with a triangle of two deceitful lovers and a rich man—but which is treated in an altogether different fashion. Let me make clear one more thing I'd have thought pretty obvious: while it is, of course, standard movie technique to make frequent scene changes, it's unusual for a movie to seek from the audience a continually shifting *response*. Unlike Malick's, most movie cutting does not aim to interrupt the dramatic progression: the cutting back and forth between pursuer and pursued in a regular chase sequence, for example, keeps shifting the locale but serves to build up a single response.

I could go on explaining my meaning, but I don't think my article needs any supplement, and a reading of it should suffice to refute Mr. Young's overwrought accusations. He carps at my examining, in order to answer the question of why a shot is beautiful, what comes before and after it in the film, when such a procedure is plainly called for by my stated intention of ascertaining "the purpose served by its beauty beyond that of pleasing us for the moment." He takes me to task for what, on the basis of two brief asides I wrote, he erroneously surmises to be my views on two old films. It seems evident that Mr. Young is more concerned with denouncing my article (which made him see *red*) than with elucidating the issues.

GILBERTO PEREZ

Princeton, New Jersey

Dear Editors,

The rare combination of intelligent writing and penetrating visual insight which is present in the Gilberto Perez piece on *Days of Heaven* was a considerable delight and inspiration. A delight, because Mr. Perez, avoiding the excesses of auteurist fantasies and structuralist detective-work, manages to keep his eye on the leitmotifs of personal and social alienation that give the movie a uniquely tragic visual splendor. An inspiration, because of his persistent evocations of that Ariadne-thread of a deeply-felt, universal humanism without which the movies have so often shattered on the rocks of that very alienation.

JOHN HUGHES

New York City



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JUDITH HEMSCHEMEYER

All These Things

All These Things She Kept in Her Heart

the knives she hid when her dad came home drunk

the time he lurched into her room
wearing her dead mother's flowered robe

the mattress-factory job she had
where that man said, "Let's go on a picnic, Hon,
I'll bring the wiener if you'll bring the bun"

her best friend snaring Daddy
and telling her, when she found out,
"Don't put me on a pedestal . . ."

All these things she kept in her heart for years

and told them one by one
to me on Saturdays
when I was almost grown

and we cleaned the house together
because we did it best

always starting in mid-sentence

—"yes, the priest,
he made my mother have that baby to the end,
even though he knew they both were doomed"—

as if replying to a question

as if I'd dared to ask

her attention always fiercely on
the table she was waxing
or the window she was washing

the shriek of old sheeting against wet glass

To a Friend

When the pictures of me come
I stare at them
to find out who I am

You say I'm getting hard

but don't you know
that every word I write down now
must be replaced inside me with stone

and every company
at last become familiar
except my own

except my own

"Not Know Me Yet?"

After all these years
after the quarrel
after we made up once more
in bed in the dark

did I really feel your knuckle
brush across my eyes
in search of tears?

Not know me yet?

De Chirico Street

a de Chirico street
chiri—coo—coo—coo

the same stillness
the same steeply angled sun and shade

but the dove is from home
from the cedars between the two yards

and where to lie down? hot cobbles or cold?
either way like sleeping on a bed of eyes

and here comes an iceman:
leather apron and cap

burlap bag on his shoulder and tongs
he is clamping the ice between tongs

and just as he passes
the sun through it makes it a jewel

on his shoulder
a rose-colored jewel warm as flesh

which it is—flesh of my flesh
with barely etched translucent limbs

Obsession

My body wants only one thing now,
your skin against its lips

Night after night it stares in the dark

aching, inconsolable,
its throat a cage of tears

And see where it haunts the parapet

begging for deliverance,
threatening to jump

Well let it. People don't die from this.

Icon

Miles from any place I'd ever been before,
I clung to you

the air cool green
the ivory of your skin

the way your eyes darted
when I touched you

like startled birds they were

and your grave smile
forgiving me my only sin:

that it took me so long to find you
and place you in the sacred corner

the *krasnie ugol* of my hut
to the right as you enter the door

Best Friends

When you call, your cheerfulness thick as armadillo hide,
I'm supposed to help you keep it up.

You say I have no small talk. Well, you're right.
I don't care what color your new drapes are.

I want to know what you've done with her,
the girl who was you.

Remember that bad book you helped me write, our childhood?
The night your parents begged you to take sides?

The time our race to the toilet ended a dead heat
and we sat together laughing on the seat?

You scotch-taped your wedding pictures, but the rips still show,
ugly as a set of stretch marks.

Christ! If only you would barnstorm out of there.
Instead you call, circling like a wounded jet

through your spiral of topics—safe, banal—
your private holding pattern over hell.

Prayer After Mass

“Hail holy queen,
mother of mercy,
our life, our sweetness and our hope

To thee do we cry,
poor banished children of Eve,
to thee do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this vale of tears . . .”

But I didn't know that vale meant valley

and each time
I imagined the mother of Jesus
wearing a veil of tears

her tears mostly
but mine too because I had hurt her sweet son

When she moved
the tears moved with her
so she had to walk slowly

completely surrounded
by a shining bell of mist

and rainbows
and inside
about six inches behind the veil

not knowing why
she had to suffer so

she was

Something's Inside the Hive

I saw it in the bee book
eating the honey and wax
breaking down the cells

A strong hive will repel the invader
the bee book says
if you keep the air flowing
put in new frames

Il faut changer un peu les idées . . .

But I can't for I've found
that the poem loves only the dark
the old, the half-forgotten honey
of the mind

Amimetobian

"For they made an order betwene them, which they called Amimetobian (as much as to say, no life comparable and matcheable with it) one feasting ech other by turnes, and in cost, exceeding all measure and reason."

—Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius*

Exiled to Voronezh
for the poem he wrote about Stalin
("... His fingers are fat grubs... His cockroach whiskers
leer...")

driven to paranoia
and that leap from the hospital window
that dislocated his shoulder and cleared his mind

recalled and kept revolving, kept on "Hold"
in the hundred-kilometer zone,
that wheel of wooden villages surrounding Moscow

arrested again
and sent to a camp
where he died of "heart failure"

Osip Emilievich Mandelstam
had nothing in this life

except his poetry:
"Today is all beak
and no feathers..."

a wife who went with him,
memorized every word he wrote
and brought it back from the dead

and the friendship
of Anna Andreyevna Akhmatova,
his peer.

But wasn't that everything?

Seated on the shabby couch

they called “the Bessarabian carriage”
they rode all night

flinging each other lines from Dante,
from Pushkin,
from their own new poems

getting high on Ariosto,
on *chai iz stakana*, tea from a glass
and slang remembered from their student days.

They were—and they must have known it—
the Antony and Cleopatra
of that wolfish season

“ . . . one feasting ech other by turnes,
and in cost,
exceeding all measure and reason.”

Getting Ready to Translate Akhmatova

for E. L. and W. L.

White house, gray shiny-painted porch
hugging the hill

the woman on her tractor cutting hay
right down to the woods

right down to the one birch
bending its white neck . . .

It's a cliché!
I'm even cleaning mushrooms

Upstairs in the guest-room mirror,
grass of Parnassus

—creamy petals lined with green—
floats like Easter vestments

stiffly Orthodox
and doomed

Muse, sister, I know you're here:
túcha is stormcloud, *néba*, sky

and this morning Wassily set an extra place
at the table

without knowing why

Something Silver in the Air

and then
a stab of joy:

corduroy whipping between my legs
as I walk

in the distance a flock of sparrows
flowing from tree to roof
and back again

and crouching in the grass that peasant,
that tulip leaf outlined in red

holding her little one
in thick, green arms

The Week You Were Dying

Mother, the week you were dying,
we finished the bread you had baked

the Host,
the last of you at last inside me

then every doilie, every chair,
every stick of furniture,
every inch of every rug,
the green one from the living room
where you were walked all night by Dad
the time you gobbled aspirin

I stole relics: soap you'd started,
lipstick, half a piece of gum,
your red fishing shirt from Penney's
I still have on

Ironing, I had to bend down,
so low had you set the board
for your long arms that grabbed the wheel
and tried to wrench us off the road
when Dad was going eighty

To kill us all?
Because we didn't love you best?
Mother, I love Daddy too

Rest now

Rest

BARBARA REID

The Waltz Dream

THEY GOT IN THE CAR, all five of them for a change, Anna on the front seat with Bill, her cameo face turned away from him, screened by her long dark hair. Anna with him for once. In the back Mary Beth sat between the boys. She had wanted to sit with them because she did not feel so frightened, except they asked so many questions it tired her. It felt as if a hand had pulled down her features then, her eyelids drooping and her cheeks and mouth all gone slack and strange.

"Nana," said Lance now. "Will the doctor put another hole in your throat?"

"I hope not, dear," Mary Beth said in her voice which had suddenly gone whispery and strange.

They were bringing her to the hospital again, and the two boys, Lance and Sandy, stared at Mary Beth's throat though she was wrapped up in her old mink coat and a blanket as well.

"That's a dumb question," Sandy told Lance. "The doctor would use the same hole."

"Then it will be a bigger hole?" Lance went on, and Mary Beth clasped his warm small hand. "You will breathe through it, won't you, Nana? I know about that."

What they couldn't know was the dread—the baffling weakness, the double vision, she would see four little boys instead of two, and she would choke on a piece of toast. A few minutes ago she had choked on calf's liver, nothing went down, a pill was the size of a melon; she couldn't find her breath. She wondered if they would do another tracheotomy. She had had to explain that to her grandsons who peered through the doorway in fascinated silence as Lily, her nurse, cleansed and dressed her wound when she came home from the hospital, where she had been on the respirator. In the hospital, when she had at last come to, she had watched herself breathing, her puzzled blue eyes on the respirator as it went up and down, so even and steady it was a wonder it didn't lull her to sleep. What if it were unplugged? She felt useless beside the huge silver machine that kept her lungs filled with oxygen—useless and fragile—and she could not take her eyes from the long tube that

was fastened from her throat to the respirator, going up and down, up and down. Sleep it said, but she could not.

It was such a struggle to breathe now she could not help thinking about it. She watched her breath going out in plumes in the icy air. She watched the boys' breaths too, only they moved about so much they reminded her of young colts snorting in a dawn workout. The back seat was filled with clouds of Spearmint. The blanket slipped and she had to ask the boys to pull it up. It was so cold! I wonder if it will be spring when I come home this time, Mary Beth thought.

"Why am I here?" she had asked the doctor when she came to.

He hesitated. Then because she insisted on knowing, Dr. Sloane said, his long face gentle as he held her hand, "You have myasthenia gravis."

The name frightened her almost more than the symptoms did. Spoken, the words had a knell, deriving from dead languages, myasthenia from the Greek for muscle weakness, gravis the Latin for severe. Anyway everyone called it MG, just as her husband Jules and her friends had shortened Mary Beth to MB and then they called her Emmy Bee. But she was Nana now to Bill and Anna, to the boys whom she saw more than she did anyone else after Lily left. Jules had been gone three years. Her friends had stopped in to see her occasionally, then they phoned Anna and asked solicitous questions, and then they sent cards and notes as though they were afraid they would catch it, this MG that caused her to shrink from size 12 to 8 and had altered her so, her expression droopy and peculiar, her limbs gone limp, that hump between her shoulders because she couldn't stand straight. Have I really lived with Bill and Anna two years? she marveled. She had and most of the time it seemed like one endless day. At the age of seventy-seven every day that passed was a day tricked from time, and when one was as ill as she was it was a miracle she had lasted at all. She had been on the respirator for weeks, or was it months? She was confused about that. Time got all muddled when you were this old, this ill. Sometimes she would make her way to the bureau and look at herself in the mirror and with surprise see barely a trace of the woman she had been. Her eyes were as large and as blue but filled with apprehension. Her dressing gown hung loose. Her hair looked like goose feathers. Everything about her

was wispy. I was another woman, Mary Beth would think. Who was I? What happened to me?

Somehow, Dr. Sloane told her in his careful way, the electrical conductor between nerve and muscle was lacking, the communication was lacking. At least he didn't lie, Mary Beth thought. He treats me like I'm somebody. And when she asked why some days were worse than others her words were muddled, as if a thermometer were in her mouth. Only the boys could understand her when her voice slurred like that. But she could be mute and they would know what she wanted to say, just as they knew when their dog needed a run. Nothing frightened them, not even the change in her that scared her out of her wits whenever she thought about it, which was almost all the time. Her only comfort then was to let her mind roam over the past which had been full of excitement, such fun—such fun. . . . Sitting down, she would close her eyes and pretend nothing had changed but finally her reveries of all that happy gone time would leave her, and she would realize: I am here, in Bill and Anna's house, and how strange it is that it should be so, that I am like a little child now that has to be watched, a dependent. I never wanted that, never.

Port Washington, that was the town she was living in now. Weekdays Bill would catch the 8:10 train to New York, Anna would usually be at a committee meeting, the boys would be at school. Now that she was alone in the empty house so much Mary Beth couldn't wait till the boys came home, dashing in with the fresh air still about them, their cheeks red, eyes bright—Lance, the younger one, with his father's grave dark blue eyes and dark hair and square little jaw, Sandy dark-haired too but with his mother's beauty and more complicated nature. With them Mary Beth could pretend that her illness was only a game, that she could cut her meat herself if she wanted, zip her dress in the back, run to answer the phone. They weren't afraid. And so somehow she had conveyed to Bill just now that she wanted to sit with them in the car. "No, no, the back," she had managed to whisper, and then Bill had lifted her in.

He was driving slowly though it was no longer snowing. The yellow headlights lit up the furrows left by the snow plow. So deep was the snow on the sides of the road Mary Beth could hardly make out the familiar landmarks: the garbage dump, the golf

course covered with skiers and sleds in the starry night, and now and then the houses almost lost behind great drifts, their lights tunneling through the shrubbery and fences.

Lance turned away from the window where he had been watching the sleighriding. "Dad has three scars," he said.

"No. He has four," Sandy said. "One from his appendix and three from the war."

"Three from the war," Lance said with awe. "Dad, do you have four scars?"

"Can't you boys talk about something else?" Bill said impatiently.

"Three from the war," Lance said to himself, in wonder.

Mary Beth took his hand under the blanket and the little boy leaned against her. His body was warm as toast. The bodies of little boys were fueled with energy, self-starting engines that needed just a touch to get going. She had had only one boy. One child. She looked at Bill. He had the window open and was hatless and the icy air rushed in.

Anna spoke for the first time. "It's freezing with that window open," she said.

"It's fresh air," Bill said in that tight voice he had these days.

"I don't care, I'm freezing. That's so goddamned typical of you, Bill. So thoughtless."

"You know damned well I'm allergic to cigarette smoke," Bill said.

"That's another of your crazy hangups," Anna said. "Like sleeping with all the windows open. God, I'm sick of sleeping with my robe and slippers on. That's just another instance of how selfish you are."

"Then stop smoking," he said.

"Never," Anna said. "Never." And she curled up against the door, pulling her scarf over her head, dragging on her cigarette and glaring at Bill. She had the profile of a saint, a beauty so pure, flawless that even angry she looked like an avenging angel. Tranquil she was a Della Robbia angel, so that it came as a shock to see her filled with fury as so much of the time she was. She flew at everyone with her shrill voice, possessed it would seem by a perverse demon, even the collie kept his distance. She was Italian, hot-hearted but not tender any more, not tender. Every day the marriage got worse, every day there was some new grievance that pulled Anna and Bill apart. Perhaps because Mary Beth sided

with Bill, though only in silence with quivering lips and pained eyes, Anna was withdrawing with greater resentment than she would if Mary Beth were not living with them. Mary Beth looked at Bill's hair blowing in the wind and remembered when he was small and wore a Dutch cut, a gentle little boy who had not wanted to be fondled at all. He had come when she was almost forty, but she had been careful not to fondle and stroke him, thinking also he might grow up with a complex and develop emotional attachment to men if he were to become too close to his mother. Oh, no, she had kept hands off, and Jules had done the same, and Bill had grown up independent of them. Now how he needed to be touched! She longed to put out her hand and stroke his cheek where that small pulse of tension beat, put her arm around his shoulders and tell him everything was just fine. But he would never let her—he had his own need of pretending, and her touch would only tell him what he knew too well, that he was a stranger in his own house as was she, that Anna didn't love him. What a terrible thing! Mary Beth couldn't bear thinking about it. When Bill came home from work, late, from his brokerage firm in Wall Street where he escaped in the highs and lows of the stock market, he'd stand in the door of her room a minute or two. By then she would be propped up with pillows on the high bed, watching the news on television. Bill's face would be tense, uneasy, as if he didn't know what to expect and was bracing for the worst. The crystal ball was clouded. Soon it would be shattered. He was prematurely grey. He had an ulcer. He'd say in his edgy voice, "Hi—how's it going?" then leave her alone with Walter Cronkite or John Chancellor. Sometimes he'd stop in with a magazine or the newspaper. "Good piece on Washington," he'd say. She would be alone with James Reston. He hardly spent any time with her. It was as if he couldn't bring himself to look into her eyes, for she couldn't bear thinking about it and couldn't dissemble; no matter how she tried there were signals of distress. So left alone as she was Mary Beth fondled the boys, stroked their tousled hair, tickled them, let them climb over the bed, let their gerbils climb over her when the dog was out of the room. If she felt strong enough and her voice was good she would tell them about the past she would make believe was close, so close she was right back in those magical days, as full of spirit as they, as free. "Do you know I grew up in Harlem?" she would say. "Oh, yes, I did and it was wonderful. We lived in a townhouse that was opposite the Mott estate. I wonder what's happened to it now.

Then we moved to Twenty West Seventieth Street. After school I went roller-skating in Central Park, and in the winter I went ice-skating with a boy named Mons Osterberg. He sent me Valentines addressed to Cupid's Terrace, Lovingdale and they were post-marked Lika You Much. I remember that so clearly! Yes, and I had elocution lessons and learned *delsarte* and carried my dancing slippers in a little velvet bag to the Hotel Majestic on Seventy-second Street and Central Park West—that's where the dancing school was—and I danced the waltz and two step and all the boys signed my card for each dance. They wore white gloves and bowed. Manners were as important as morals," Mary Beth would say, "and then we stepped out on the ballroom and we danced the two step and the waltz and we whirled round and round and wanted to dance forever."

"*Dancing* school!" Sandy would say with scorn, looking up from the Indian he was drawing. "Oh, *Nana*! Dancing school—that's sissy stuff!"

"I wouldn't like dancing school," Lance echoed. "That's sissy stuff!"

Mary Beth was transported, her blue eyes wide as she gazed out the window at the old oak that in her memory had become a stage. "Yes, and when I was in my teens I played in theatricals with the Columbia boys from Gamma Delta Psi fraternity. We played at the Hamilton Grange Reform Church at One Hundred Forty-ninth Street and Convent Avenue, and I was a moon-maid in *The Moon in the Picture*. I wonder what's happened to that church. Everything's changed so much."

She had talked too long. Suddenly her neck felt weak and she slumped down. Her eyelids fluttered, then closed.

"Are you asleep, *Nana*?" Lance asked.

"No. She's trying to breathe," Sandy said, coming closer.

"Through the hole?" Lance asked, fascinated.

"Does it hurt?" Sandy asked.

Their questions tired her though. They surely did. Sometimes she was so exhausted it was all she could do to take her pill, the Mestinon that was keeping her alive. "You're my water boy," she whispered to Lance as the child brought her the glass of water filled to overflowing and the pill dissolved at last. "You're my TV boy," she whispered to Sandy as he turned on the set. "That's the way it is," Walter Cronkite would say.

That was the way it was. When Anna and Bill were together

there was either an uproar or they weren't speaking to each other, and then it was a different pain that consumed and grieved her and that was as hard to live with as MG. Lily stayed until Mary Beth's throat healed. The boys dashed in and out of her room until it seemed as full of commotion as Penn Station. They would tease each other and carry on and glad for the diversion she would let them. They would tease her. "What is a Baltimore Oriole, Nana?" "Why, that is a black and orange bird that sings a pretty song." "No, it isn't—it's a bird that plays *baseball*!" "Where's the great planes, Nana?" and she would say, "Oh, they're in Nebraska and Oklahoma." "No, they're not—they're in the great *hangars*!" She would laugh then. She would caress them and they would let her. Stroke their silky heads at bedtime as if to comfort them that their long day was over, they resisted it so. Time flows, Mary Beth thought. But where has it gone? Where is it? And what is it? It is us, and I cannot catch up. . . . The boys would settle down beside her, quiet at last. Then Anna would be on the scene. "Boys!" Anna would command, pulling them up. "Nana needs her rest. I want you to clean up your room right this minute. You've left it a mess. You know how that aggravates me. You're not two years old." Anna told Mary Beth she must not fuss over the boys so much, that she was spoiling them and making them difficult, and it touched the quick. We all touch each other's quick, Mary Beth thought, that is what hurts the most. In my house we were careful of each other's feelings. Oh, she hadn't wanted to live with Bill and Anna after Jules died, to be an in-law and a dependent at that, no longer her own woman, having to ask for everything, indulged then and humored and chastized even as the children were; but she came down with MG and it was either live with them or in a nursing home, and there wasn't enough money for a nursing home.

Bill was driving carefully on the snowy road. She had had an attack at dinner. The calf's liver wouldn't go down, it stuck in her windpipe and she lost her breath, her balance. She tried to get up and fell, lying there on the floor clutching her throat and gasping for air in wild terror. Bill phoned the doctor. It was another crisis. Then he bundled her up in her coat and hat and took her small suitcase with the few things she kept in it in case of emergency, her nightgown and bed jacket and toothbrush and all, and he carried her to the car, stepping over the roots of the old oak that thrust up through the snow. The tree was just outside her window and she would see its trunk all gnarled and full of boles and knots and

think how it was like her life . . . its roots coming up all doubled-over with those knots, weathered from living so long, or loving, it came to the same thing in the end. . . . She looked at Bill and Anna, wanting to tell them: Speak to each other, say something nice even if you don't mean it, that's all it comes to in the end. . . . But they were silent. They had retreated within themselves. People in an unhappy marriage get enclosed in glass, Mary Beth thought. They have passed through fire and hardened, and I want to touch my boy and make everything right, and I can't, he just draws away. . . .

Last night Anna's voice had been so loud down the hall. "God, Bill, don't you ever think of someone besides yourself?"

"You're a great one to talk," Bill had said.

"Somebody's got to see to the house," Anna said.

"Hell, you're never around. Who gets the kids to bed, gives them their baths?" Bill said.

"Somebody's got to serve on the PTA who understands children," Anna said. She was so restless, spending hours on the phone and at her meetings, busy with clubs, activities, causes.

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" Bill said, his voice rising.

"You say nothing that's constructive," Anna stormed. "You *do* nothing that's constructive. That's right. Walk away. You've walked away from every issue the ten years I've been married to you. Because you're passive. *Passive*."

Bill had turned on his heels and walked away. Sometimes after one of their scenes he would stop at Mary Beth's door to see if she'd heard and his cheek would twitch. He would look slighter, smaller, diminished by Anna's words as he gazed at her in silence. And Mary Beth would feel the weakness come over her from her head to her toes. His misery and her MG seemed one and the same. If she'd been able to, she couldn't touch him. He would just look at her and turn away and her heart would ache. Sometimes when she heard Bill and Anna at it, she would ring the little bell on her nighttable; but usually it would be one of the children who would come and hand her the glass of water for her pill. At least they were there. She didn't know what she would do without them. It was so hard living with Bill and Anna. It was so lonely she thought she could die of it. . . .

She looked at the boys again, Lance still curled up next to her, and she reached over to Sandy and held their hands together with hers under the blanket, but they began to push each other and

Sandy kicked the front seat and his father said, "Stop doing that!" and they drove on without talking.

They were on the road to Glen Cove and the lights of the town turned the sky pink and the trees stood out against it with branches dark under the snow. Mary Beth would have loved the ride had she felt well, outings were a rarity, but they had been gone an eternity. The boys were giving each other pokes behind her back. It would end in a fight. She would try to distract them. First Lance, then Sandy who was the more intractable. Suddenly the moon began to rise, even as she watched, round and yellow and incredible as an eclipse. "Look, Lance," Mary Beth said slowly. "Over the hill there. See the moon?"

"It goes where we go," Lance said.

"No, it doesn't really," Sandy said. "It just seems to."

"The moon," Lance said, as if he could touch the word.

"Later tonight it will be white, not yellow, and it will shine on the snow," Mary Beth said in her slow weak way. "Won't that be lovely, Sandy?"

"The moon," Lance said, enchanted.

"It's getting white now," Sandy said with delight.

It rose even as they looked at it. They were in fairly open country and already it had left the hill, rising incredibly. Mary Beth remembered when she and Jules had looked in this section for a house. She felt the pang of loss again, a longing so keen for Jules that she let go the boys and put her hand to her breast, under the waning moon of her life she missed the past, or was it the loss of the future that held out so many options? "Shall we rent this house, or did you like the one with the fireplace? . . . Do you want to have dinner in the city, or shall we just go to the Club?" She remembered the large white bedroom she used to have with the dormer windows—which house was that in, the house on Brookside Drive, or Arleigh Road, or was it on Westgate Boulevard?—the wide bed under the windows, the highboy where every night Jules hung his pants from the top drawer when there was a whole closet for him to hang them in, and they would have words about it, laughing though, oh, yes, and the vanity table, yes, with her perfumes and silver brush and comb and flowers and pictures of the family all as much a part of her as her two hands. They moved so often and each time they did it was a wrench, but Jules had never wanted to own property, and either the landlord came back or something went wrong with the house the landlord wouldn't take care of, and

with each move they lost a little of themselves. The dreams they had each time they moved! They had come to Great Neck because theater people and writers lived there, Jane Cowl and H. B. Warner, Ring Lardner and P. G. Wodehouse and Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, and then when the amusing people drifted to Hollywood or abroad, they stayed on, moving from town to town as if they were in repertory. But Jules was a dear. She'd have gone anywhere with him. She thought how handsome he was with his mane of dark hair and strong features that made him look so commanding. He looked like an actor, she said. Even a great one, he said, and then he would act the part when they had company, turning his profile like John Barrymore and waving a white handkerchief at her as if she were Ophelia. Oh, he was a dear. Before Bill came along they spent almost every weekend in the city—New York was always "the city"—they would get on the Long Island Railroad with its yellow straw seats and in an hour they would check in at the Algonquin where they would say hello to George Kaufman and Dorothy Parker and all those wonderful people, and then they would go to the Café Martin, or Jack's, or the St. Regis roof garden, or the Brevoort where they threw confetti at Lindbergh in his thrilling parade. And they went many times to speak-easies where good Scotch was plentiful and Mary Beth felt daring and took off her wedding ring just to pretend she was having an affair with this handsome devil.

Time flows. The memories rushed back, so many they made her head spin, and who was there to listen, who could make them seem something she had not dreamed? To Lily who was so kind, Mary Beth said, "I have seen apple blossom time in Normandy, lilac time in Kew, cherry blossom time in Washington. I have seen the three crossroads of the world—the Rue de la Paix, Hollywood and Vine, and Times Square. One New Year's Eve Jules and I went to Times Square and a woman asked him if he was Douglas Fairbanks and Jules said yes, he was and he signed his autograph! That's how dashing he was!" "That's nice to think about, isn't it?" Lily said, gently brushing back Mary Beth's hair. She had wept when Lily left. Now she was truly alone. And the days were truly endless and seemed like a single black night as, desolate, she wondered how someone as vivid as Jules could be gone.

So she told the children about him when they sat quietly drawing pictures or looking at comic books. "I met your grandfather," she said, "at the *Dramatic Mirror* when we both were working there. I

wrote the movie reviews and signed my name Mademoiselle Rialto, and he was the Editor, and we went to all the first nights, we saw every show that opened on Broadway! I had an original Patou dress that was black with yellow sleeves and I wore it to the musicals. We loved the musicals! Your grandfather knew Fred and Adele Astaire and Florenz Ziegfeld and Marilyn Miller. He knew Cole Porter and Irving Berlin and George Gershwin and everyone! He wrote songs himself. He wrote one for my cat. That's why I married him."

"He wrote a song for your *cat*?" Sandy asked with surprise. "Can you sing it?"

"'Oh, Marse Wheeney comes a-walking down the lane,' " Mary Beth sang. "'Sees a girl a-looking through the windowpane.' He was so much fun. I'd never met anybody like your grandfather. He wrote this *lovely* song for my cat and he sang it to Marse Wheeney."

"I like cats," Lance said softly.

"So do I!" Mary Beth said as she pulled the boys closer. "Oh, I remember when your grandfather was doing publicity for the Shuberts and he got the orchestra from *Blossom Time* to come to Central Park Zoo. They played the lovely music from that show to the lions and tigers in their cages, and those big cats stopped pacing around and stood still and listened!"

Jules, the charmer. The magician. The exact sense of that day came back to her as she closed her eyes then and saw the azaleas and cherry trees in bloom, their petals floating with the balloons in the flawless blue sky. Standing with Jules behind the orchestra, her foot keeping time to the music that always seemed to surround him. Jules, the composer. He could be as famous as Cole Porter, she used to tell him, if he'd just work at his songs, the entire world would sing them. . . . "Yes, the lions and tigers stopped roaring and listened!" she said.

"They did?" Sandy and Lance exclaimed, together.

"Oh, yes, they did!" Mary Beth replied. "But that was because your grandfather was standing behind the orchestra and holding up a big piece of meat! And so the photographer took this wonderful picture of those lions and tigers looking so intent with their shining eyes, as if they *loved* the music. The picture got in all the newspapers." She paused thinking a lot more than that day had been lost. "I wonder what happened to that picture. I wish I had it to show you."

Anna and Bill had cleared out Mary Beth's house of all those

photographs and clippings and treasures. God knows what they'd done with them, carted them to the garbage dump probably. Only the photograph of Jules was left, the one of him sitting in the hollow of a tree, with his Cheshire Cat grin and his hat at a jaunty angle. That was taken when Jules had settled down to being a reporter at the *World-Telegram* if it could be said he'd ever settled down. Often when he wasn't on a story he'd phone her to come to the city from Great Neck or Manhasset or Plandome or wherever it was they were living. She wasn't working then and she'd leave Bill with her sister and brother-in-law who lived near those towns and get on the train and meet Jules at the Algonquin, and then they'd have dinner and go to some wonderful show or party.

"Your grandfather did the most *fantastic* things!" Mary Beth told the boys as another memory flashed into her head. "He was a member of the Cheese Club that was made up of newspaper people and theatrical agents, and one day they all marched in a parade down Eighth Avenue from Fifty-ninth Street to Thirty-fourth Street and then over to Broadway and back up again. The Fifth Avenue Association wouldn't let them march down Fifth, because they were wearing overalls and there were elephants too."

"Were there many elephants, Nana?" Lance asked, enthralled.

"Oh, yes," she said, enthralled herself at the idea of it. "Many elephants with show girls sitting on them! Everyone was wearing overalls because they were so practical, you see—the parade was to call attention to the high cost of living. Then when the parade ended everyone went to the Waldorf and had a wonderful party. He was such a gadabout, your grandfather, and so was I!"

She started to tell the boys about a party at Texas Guinan's nightclub where a man had taken *her* for a movie actress, Ruby Keeler, because she'd had her dark hair bobbed in bangs and had tap-danced around the table to Jules. But Sandy and Lance had lost interest and were down on the floor racing their small Ferraris and Porsches about. Mary Beth looked at Jules's picture on the bureau, then out the window, and then closing her eyes she tricked back the memory till she could see Jules standing at the window grinning at her, blowing his breath on the misty pane and writing on it: IT'S WONDERFUL! MLE RIALTO. DON'T MISS IT! MLE RIALTO. God, do I! she thought, her eyes blurring. For she longed for him with a knowledge of her own extinction, soon maybe this awful lingering would be over and she'd be with him, her endearing and restless ghost.

Lost in memory, she asked the boys one day: "Do you ever pretend?"

"Sure!" Sandy smiled.

"Sure I do," Lance said eagerly. "Do you, Nana?"

"All the time," Mary Beth said. She liked to pretend Jules was going to walk in any minute, saying he had news for her, his arms wrapped around her. Or maybe he would be playing Cole Porter's songs on the piano. Gershwin's songs. College songs.

Oh, the red hot spot
To cast your lot
Is with old DKE. . . .

Where was the Deke pin? Mary Beth missed the tokens of his presence. She hadn't seen it in months—in two years in fact. "I will give you each a dollar if you find my little Deke pin," she said to the boys. "It's shaped like a diamond and is black and has gold letters DKE on it. Your grandfather gave it to me and it's precious." They couldn't find it and Anna was irritated when she saw them rummaging through the living room desk. "What on earth are you doing?" Anna asked. "Looking for Nana's Deke pin," they said. "Fraternities are an evil. In fact they're stupid and passé," Anna told Mary Beth. So that answered that. But what had happened to all Jules's things? His lucky silver dollar he always stroked before he bet on a horse or bought a new suit? Where was the Working Press card that he wore on his hat? The watch Jack Dempsey had given him? After Jules died Mary Beth had sat down on the floor with his writings heaped about her, bewildered by their sheer profusion and devastated by their vitality. "Nothing as dead as yesterday's newspaper," Jules used to say, but here were his best newspaper pieces, his unproduced plays, his songs carefully scored, his journals, those wonderful journals in which he listed wines he'd drunk, restaurants he'd been to, shows he'd seen, celebrities he'd known, the names of winning pitchers, racehorses, boxers, the Great Books he'd read. How she'd loved his journals. And she had marveled how things lived on when the person to whom they had meant so much was gone, that the chair he always sat in had survived him, that the silver cup he drank milk out of as a little boy had outlasted even his old age. Only what had happened to the things he loved, that were invested with such passionate caring they had a life of their own, a luster and patina that comforted her,

touched as they had been by him? After his death, numbed with grief she had walked around touching his things. She hated to think they had been thrown out with the garbage. So in time she came to play a game of pretense, with eyes shut she would imagine that Jules would be there, that he would be telling her again about when he was a Deke at Yale—he was so proud of making Deke—and about the great time he had when he wrote, directed and acted in the college musical, *New Havenights*, and about the tables down at Mory's, and his old girls who never had her appeal. . . .

Then she would hear Jules playing his own songs on the piano.

"I just want to be your lit-tle love, tur-tle dove, and all the other names too."

"You must write it down!" Mary Beth had told him.

"I just did," Jules said as he bent over the keys. "Listen to *this*, Emmy Bee! 'I know the day when you're going to pop the question. Saw it in your eyes. You al-ways seem to dis-cover my in-tentions. You are ex-tremely wise. . . .'"

Oh, yes, and Jules phoning her from the Shuberts one morning. "We're sailing at midnight on the 'France'! Pack the bags!"

"But we can't. I haven't the right clothes!" Mary Beth had cried.

"Buy them," he said. "We've got our passports . . ."

She'd packed their suitcases and then in the city she'd bought a pale yellow chiffon dress and a chartreuse velvet evening wrap and a navy knit suit and cloche and sensible shoes, and the entire crossing to Cherbourg she hadn't worn her wedding ring. At the Captain's table, where they sat, Senator Wadsworth played footsie with her and Jules flirted with all the women, and in the lounge in the evening they listened to Helen Morgan sitting on the piano and singing "My Bill." It was like *Show Boat* being married to Jules. The curtain went up on a new act all the time. Paris. How marvelous it was. In bed with each other and the reflections of the street lights thrown up and moving over the ceiling, moving over them, and it was as if it had never happened so excitingly before, they were new to each other. That was Paris. Everything new . . . And then the "Golden Arrow" to Calais and the Channel steamer and Dover and again the train flying past the lovely villages. Then London. Mayfair and pageantry. More shows. More shops. More dancing and love and fun. For a few years it almost seemed they commuted abroad. Yes, it made the painful drift of her days bearable when she could remember how it was living with Jules. . . .

But then Mary Beth would recall when he went into the hospital with cancer. "Should I wear the grey suit for the Confederacy or the blue suit for the Union?" he'd asked with a gleam in his eyes, fighting the ordeal in his whimsical way. When they wheeled him in he had on his blue suit and Charvet tie with little fishes swimming on blue silk, and for a few days after the operation his spirits were high and she had laughed as he told her how he'd had a hallucination the man in the next bed was she. "Yeah, I tried to get up," said Jules, "and get in with him. I thought he'd be all warm and snuggly." His eyes had rested with relief and gratitude on the bottle of intravenous attached to his hand; but his stomach was still swollen like a football from the cancer—the operation had been unavailing, it was all through him. On his last good day Bill and Anna had stopped in, then they left and stood on the ground below with the children who were waiting with Mary Beth's sister Connie, Lance just two years old, Sandy only four. Mary Beth had cranked up the bed so that Jules could see them from the window, and the children waved to him and he waved feebly back. Then Jules had turned and looked at her and that was the last time he talked to her.

"Emmy Bee!" he said urgently, and the little grimace she had come to fear passed over his face.

"What do you want, dear?" she asked.

"You," he said.

She held his hand tightly. "Oh, your pink Scotch cheeks and your blue eyes," Mary Beth said. "Bluebell," she said, stroking his hand.

Jules's eyes lingered on her face and then closed and he smiled.

Oh, I'd like to cry but I cannot let him see me, she thought. Stroking his hand which was curled up now like a little child's, she thought: How will I live without him? Words from the old hymn "the strife is o'er, the battle done" entered her mind. What battle? she asked herself, fiercely wanting to fight the dread invader in his body. It's not over and never will be.

Then she thought: Love is long too and never ends. It's all you have out of life really and it brings you such pain. Grieving she thought: I am barely holding on. This silence falls already. Knuckles in her mouth—silent screaming—watching now the tiny silver ball bounce up and down with his heartbeat on the monitoring machine. His vital sign . . .

Mary Beth remembered what transpired a few days later. She

saw Jules in the coma without his dentures. Had he known that he would have had a fit, he was such a dresser, so vain—did he know what he looked like then? she wondered. His face like a mask, and without his dentures? Did he feel his hand in hers? Could he hear her? “Jules, this is Emmy Bee. I’m here, darling.” Did his forehead seem to clear as she spoke? What time do you leave the body? There were times now Mary Beth felt she had already left hers.

It was a back road Bill had taken where the traffic was light and he could make better time, though they still crept along over the furrows and patches of ice the snow plow had cleared. There was an occasional house and now and then a car went by coming the other way. That was a sound Mary Beth liked, the sound of cars rushing past in the night, making a whoosh . . . life rushing out in a whoosh . . . yes, that’s what it was like whether or not you were on the respirator. One second you were there and the next you were gone. Where had Jules gone inside himself in the coma? Where was he now? She could hear herself breathing. It sounded labored, loud in her ears. It sounded like a whoosh.

This knocking in the blood was a sexual thing. Is it you after all this time, Jules? Mary Beth wondered. I seem to hear your voice just the way it was, but like a whisper, dear. Are you really there? I wish it so. Suddenly she felt her strength leaving her. She fell into a semi-conscious state, not feeling anything but a dark hollow place which opened to her, so easeful it was. Close your eyes in the warm dark, stop fighting for breath—that hurts dreadfully—let it have its way, this thing pressing down on your chest like all the weakness has coalesced there and weighs so heavily that you gasp with each breath. You are exhausted, so give over, that’s it, just lapse and let go. Deeper she fell into the pulsating dark. And she wanted to go, though life had been like a cloud rainbowed by the sun, so bright it had been, so variously bright it had been. Perhaps that was why she couldn’t go, because the cloud touched her still, things she had to do. . . . A stirring of will, deep within and stabbing needles of pain into her spine, jolted her awake with her eyes on Bill. I diapered you, she said to the back of Bill’s head. I kissed your fuzzy head when you were sleeping. She saw his stricken face bent over the respirator, saying something she couldn’t understand. He had sat down and then it seemed like he was breathing with the respirator, up and down, breathing with her and it was like when she’d carried him. She would try for Bill. She struggled to stay

awake and let the needles do their work. Your father wrote his poem "The Good Ship Bassinet" when you were just two weeks old. You were "the captain, mate and crew," Bill. Do you remember? And Jules wrote

I dread the coming of the morn
When he will sail no more
To leave the good ship Bassinet
To take on years and youth (my pet)
And reach a worldly shore.

The poem had been lost along with everything else, but Mary Beth took it as a positive sign that she remembered how it ended. Bill had reached that worldly shore and it was filled with anguish and peril. For him, for the boys, for Anna even she would try.

He and Anna were sitting as far apart as they could get from each other, and Anna was looking at Bill with narrowed eyes, her face a study. Mary Beth felt it coming on again—the band of pain pressing in her lungs, choking and strangling her, it was so heavy now that her breath came in short gasps. She was in that state again where each breath was like a hill to climb, and when you got to the top, if you ever did, you couldn't breathe for the weakness that pulled you down, paralyzing you into stone. She was seized with terror that she couldn't breathe—couldn't move. When would they get there? Would they do another trach—put her on the respirator? She'd rather die than go through that. "I can't breathe, Bill!" she called out in fear. "Hurry!" But her voice was so whispery, and the children were fighting. Sandy was shoving Lance behind her back. "Give me the space helmet. It's mine," Sandy said.

"Daddy gave it to me. It's not yours," Lance said.

"We traded it, stupid," Sandy said. "Because I traded you my Ferarri."

"Oh, boys," Mary Beth whispered but they didn't hear her.

"I can beat you up," Sandy said.

"You cannot," Lance said.

"I'll punch you in the nose if you don't give it to me," Sandy said.

"Dad," Lance said. "Sandy's messing around."

"Will you kids behave?" Bill said.

"It's not me. It's Sandy," Lance said.

"I want you to behave, both of you," Bill said. "Just shut up."

"Don't talk to them like that," Anna said. "That's no example."

"Listen, you're no rose," Bill said.

Anna leaned over and blew cigarette smoke in his face.

"You're such a sweet thing," Bill said.

"Damn you, Bill," Anna said. "Why did I come along anyway? What am I doing here? I don't know what I'm doing here."

"Mighty like a rose," Bill said.

"Oh, damn you for dragging me along," Anna said. "I mean that but you don't understand a word I'm saying and never have. I wish I'd stayed home."

Their loud voices startled Mary Beth, summoning new anguish. Hate-love. If only she could believe that there was love underneath. If only she could tell them how fine it was with someone. That was something she had to do. . . .

Smoke blew back with the wind. "Mommy," Lance said. Anna didn't answer him. Anna blew a smoke ring and then she said, "I'm the one that should be going to the hospital. I'm having a nervous breakdown. I'm blowing up a storm and it's such fun. When people don't expect you to cope, then you don't. Tell me what you expect of me, Bill. What you really think of me, I mean."

"Quit bitching, will you?" Bill said. "I'm sick and tired of it."

"I'm having a nervous breakdown. It's fun exploding into little splinters. It's like a strait jacket being around you," Anna said.

"I wish you had stayed home," Bill said.

"Well, I wish I had," Anna said. "It's how you're *treated* that matters. Only you wouldn't know that."

"How *you're* treated," Bill said. He put his foot on the brake so hard the car skidded. "For Christ's sake, Anna, I'm trying to drive!"

"What's that story about the splinter of glass that gets into the boy's eye and he can't see what's good any more?" Anna said.

"It's 'The Snow Queen,'" Sandy said.

"Yes, and I'm the Snow Queen, only it's me that's exploding into little splinters," Anna said. "Oh, hell, what's the good of talking? It's such a bloody bore."

The moon went slipping and gliding through the trees, whiter now, so full, the man in it smiling, do you see him, boys? Only Mary Beth didn't know where their thoughts were or even where her own were, everything was so muddled now, time was all muddled. She was in the car with Bill and Anna and they were quarrel-

ing and it grieved her so much she had to shut it out. She had to reach back to her memories. Now she was a young woman lying on that big white bed under the dormer windows. Now she was a child swinging her dancing slippers in a velvet bag. She and Jules were fanning themselves with newspapers on the Long Island Railroad, sighing at the heat. Only it was as if she'd dreamed it all. Was that what you lived for, to fill your head with dreams that had no more reality than the man in the moon? Once someone's gone, he's gone forever, she thought. Once something's gone, it's a fantasy. Through the trees, over the hills, like a great round lamp the moon went. It's the man in the moon, Mary Beth thought. It's as if I made them all up, the memories. It's "The Waltz Dream" as Jules would say. Life wasn't a single dream, it was many dreams, so many they dazzled and left her with unsatisfied longing. And now it was as if she were only looking on for what she saw in her memory had no reality. If there was just someone I could talk to, she thought. There's no one. There's just myself, and I've a clenched fist in my chest where it strangles me to breathe and my heart's a lump of ice like in "The Snow Queen," chilled through with dread, I cannot shake it from me. Oh, what? The boys are whispering something. They seem so far away. . . .

They were whispering behind her back. "I know a secret," Sandy said.

"Tell me," Lance said.

"If you let me have the helmet," Sandy said.

"All right. *Tell* me!" Lance said.

"The moon's made of cheese," Sandy said.

"That's no secret," Lance said.

"It's craters and rocks and dust and things and the astronauts walked on it," Sandy said.

Lance looked out the window. The white hills shone in the moonlight. "Oh," he said in a hushed voice. "The moon."

"Give me the helmet now," Sandy said.

"All right," Lance said. He took the helmet off his head and gave it to Sandy who put it on.

"I love night," Sandy said in a moment. "There are so many things to see. That star. It's so bright."

"What star?" Lance said.

"That one. It's part of a constellation. It's part of the Big Dipper," Sandy said, pointing to it.

"I see it," Lance said. Then he was looking at the moon again.

"The *moon*. The *moon*," he said in hushed wonderment.

"The *moon*," breathed Sandy.

The boys collided behind Mary Beth's back, their voices marveling as overhead rose the full white moon. They were laughing and telling each other secrets. They were caught up in their own secret world that had nothing to do with anyone else. Mary Beth felt she had accidentally collided with them. She felt the moon and the stars were riding along with them on a mysterious course whose trajectory went in circles and whose silence you could never enter. You were just thrown against this person and that person and then everyone was separate again. Yes, she felt, when all was said and done it was an accident—she had accidentally collided with Jules and Bill and Anna and the children, and her friends she used to see all the time, and Lily who was so kind—and then you all were separate again. You touched each other for a little while and it was as accidental as your fingernail scraping the icy whorls on the windowpane—you couldn't really see what it was like outside, you couldn't make anything out, it was as if no one was there, only a glimmer, something shining. "I'd like to call on you, dear, and talk to you of love." That was another of Jules's songs. Maybe if she sang it to herself long enough she would believe it.

"If you'll be con-de-scending I'll promise to be true. I won't be late if I make a date to call on you." That one came back now in his voice that was a tender whisper. "I'd like to walk with you, dear, with just the stars a-bove." But she couldn't remember how the rest of it went.

They were finally in the town. Bill drew the car up beside the hospital entrance. It was ablaze with lights. Mary Beth could not lift herself up and an attendant wheeled out a chair and put her in it. She slumped down, and taking the chair a nurse put her hat securely on her head. Mary Beth felt like closing her eyes, for so distant were they all now, Bill and Anna and the children, as if memory had made them all smaller, already leaving her, she could hardly make them out.

Then Lance, slim and serious, was standing next to her. "Nana," he said, looking at her. "Are you younger than Mommy?"

"Of course she's not, dopey," Sandy said.

"But you're so little," Lance said to her.

"Yes, I'm little now, honey," Mary Beth said in a whisper he didn't hear as she tried to bring his hand to her lips. He looked so like Bill, and like Bill he darted away to look in a shop window

that was filled with gifts. Then Sandy ran over to him and put his arm around Lance's shoulders and said something that made them laugh. Come back, Mary Beth wanted to say to them. Don't go away just yet. You'll be big before I know it, and what I'll never know hurts. Everything hurt: the needles in her spine, the ache in her lungs as her breath came in shallow gasps. And she wanted to say don't go away to the rainbowed cloud of her life, but what she said to the nurse was, "This is my home away from home!" with a toss of her head that made the nurse smile.

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

In Pursuit of the Angel

1. WING PLUMES OF THE THIEF

Late afternoon. One hour before sunset. The water level
—sinking slowly away—
exposes the crowns of barely submerged
coral heads, altering the unbroken flat plain of offshore shoals

to a museum of pinnacles and arches,
alternately bulbous and square-skulled statuary
jutting into the bay,
solid replicas of the few cumulus thunderheads spoiling the pool-
pure azure of fair skies . . . I mount
the upreared convolutions of brain coral, amazed at my sudden
heaviness, as, stooping,
I creep on gloved palms and flippers, wary
of scraping knee or elbow (the merest scratch is a wound!)—
then using my speargun as cane,
I hobble upright on a flat center promontory
stretching tall, tall,
taller—for all my knock-kneed wobbliness—than any mammalian
biped, and wave my arms, squawking

to my snorkeler-buddy, face-down, gliding between two star
coral reefs, oblivious
(in another galaxy) to the instant sculptures
jewel-studding the surface, as he weaves a zigzag path, foraging

for shellfish—lobsters, crabs,
molluscs—in hollows of the coral. From vantage
of my aerial perch,
he grapples between the furrowed gap-toothed jaws of an alligator,
the great notched maw is closing
but the corrugated fish pail afloat in the inflated truck inner tube
wedges those gums
open and breaks the bite, tugging the nylon
draw-cord tied to his weight belt. He spins around to check out
the snag, grins at the clown
poised on one leg, arms spreadeagled, sashaying
like a model: together,
we behold the arrested aviary! The hundreds of birds, circling
and diving all day—bunched over

crisscrossing and interlaced schools of mackerel, gar, jack
and kingfish moiling
in the choppy waters just beyond the surf—
have come to roost, poised on the coral shelves: the pelicans

float on their feather-cushioned
haunches, comatose; the gulls and frigate birds,
slightly bowed over,
wings folded, stand in obeisance to spreadwinged erect cormorants,
black-bottomed muscular swimmers
that chase underwater prey: now, in peacock-spanned grandeur,
they extend waterlogged
plumes to dry in the sun . . . My reign ended,
I drop to a squat. The nearest shag leans forward, dips
—wings outstretched, unmoving—
approaches a belly-flop, then flaps both wings, heavily
dragging its tail
in the water, and snatches a half-alive plump queen triggerfish
from our exposed bucket! Kicking

and splashing with his wide flat feet, a running takeoff,
he ascends. I jump,
rubber webbed-feet first, into the shallows,
replacing the canvas cover . . . *I rescue the fallen wing plume.*

2. PURSUIT OF THE ANGEL

The horizon's wide ax-blade cleaves the sun's disc: poised hemisphere
of fire, hung aloft, floats
for an unearthly long moment, windless,
as if choosing between sea and sky, shrinks to less,
less—a least flare dwindles, dies. *It is a pureness*
of vanishing . . . The constant five
or six rows of surf, alternately humped wave-
backs and foamy breakers, have shifted
from inshore shallows
to the bay's perimeter, as if flowing wrinkles of sea
surface carpet were smoothed

to the far end of the rug. Now belly-floating, just beyond
the sand bar, indolent, I
idle in thirty-foot-deep clear water.

Iridescent glitter on sea-floor shells looms near,
detail of bottom flora as starkly visible
as my hand's magnified knuckles.
Everything in view seems within arm's reach,
but fish grow scarce in this calm

transparency,
and squatter birds are thinning out, casting about dreamily
toward the roiling food-chain

cycle waters of the bay-mouth . . . Memory. *I back-stroke six hours
in my mind's eye rerun.*

*See again the direct stark light of midday,
blinding at high noon. Sunny or overcast, the glare
on live and dead particles—minutiae—thickens
to an opaque wall of murkiness,
impenetrable as dense fog. I feel
suspended in liquid cotton.
Partial clear-ups
are worse. The bottom looms close, sways out far. All surfaces
tilt, weave from side to side.*

*Objects teeter, warp—they lose and get back their shapes. I must
squint, or shut my eyes, often,
to stop the vertigo and nausea.*

But now, in this twilight saliency, eyes touch
like fingertips: sight extends the body, stretched
nerves threading the water—seeingness
grows its own skin, sensitive, sensitive!
I drop slowly from the surface,
letting reverse
gravity and my free fall momentum balance, reaching
a stillstand, for moments,

then slipping down some inches. Halfway to the bottom, I drift,
musing, past a bouquet
of anemones, their many tentacles
waving slowly. I touch one petal-shaped tuber,
and the whole colony of blooms shrinks into tight buds—
my eye recoils, a stunned flower
itself, puzzled at the vanishing blossom
quantities of atomized
anemone. I
stare and stare. They do not reinflate! . . . *If all distances
seem close up, what happens*

to up close? I force my eyes to focus nearer, the effort
to adjust my irises

like switching binoculars from mountain
skyline to shoelaces and blond leg-hairs. Scanning
minutely down lengths of my forearm and spear
gun, my dilating pupils clamp
a few cubic milliliters of plankton,
scrutinizing the carnival

upon each other—
 though none touch! *A shuffler's trick with a deck of cards.*
 Halfway into the turn, all

catch the light at once and emit a single blinding flash!
 Now in the rear, the helms-
 man chases the group. He pivots again.

Bizarrely, the others follow his rearguard lead.
 Still puzzling over the odd chain of command,
 I, accidentally, fire a spear.
 A frenzied blur. Fish are scattered, hurtling,
 in all directions at once. Spot-
 light bursts! I blink,
 again and again . . . *As swiftly, the dozens of loose cards*
fly back into the deck.

3. THE BLACK HOLES

The school of vexed spadefish sweeps in a parabolic downward
 curve—luminescent blade
 of a great scythe cutting a wide deep sea
 swathe—and drops out of sight. *Swift evacuation!*
I am left with so much just-emptied space, a hollow
waiting to be filled. What is holding
its watery breath? It seems that I'm surrounded
by a great collapsed lung, dreaming
the next inhalation.
Can the vast sea choke on its own deflatedness, drowning
in a short-winded void?

Bubbles, bubbles rising! Detritus falling, filling the black
 holes, a constant thick rain
 of live and dead matter to lightless depths.
 My eye zeroes in on minute diatoms: tissue-bits,
thin beings—slender threads of life raining down
 from the surface, never to touch
 bottom! The many frail sliver-lives, cut short
 in mid-fall, are food for bottom
 feeders . . . *Oh constant*
gift of nutriment falling from genial skies of upper sea!
Nothing starves! Nothing starves!

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Hardy's Winter Words

IN 1926 VIRGINIA WOOLF VISITED THOMAS HARDY at his Max Gate home in Dorchester, and recorded the following impressions in her diary:

He seemed perfectly aware of everything; in no doubt or hesitation; having made up his mind; and being delivered of all his work, so that he was in no doubt about that either . . . The whole thing—literature, novels, etc.; all seemed to him an amusement, far away too, scarcely to be taken seriously. Yet he had sympathy and pity for those still engaged in it. But what his secret interests and activities are—to what occupation he trotted off when we left him—I do not know.

Although Hardy was eighty-six at the time, the younger writer's observation strikes me less as an insight into the poet at an advanced stage of his life, than as a permanent truth about the extraordinary character of a man for whom "the whole thing"—literature, other people, the great world—seemed far away. But a very likely occupation for him to have trotted off to after Virginia Woolf left, would have been the writing of another poem.

At that time, Hardy had written no novels for thirty years, had written instead an astonishing number of poems; in the long line of English and American poet-novelists—Scott, Emily Brontë, Melville, Meredith, D. H. Lawrence—he assumes a commanding position. But these poems, presented in a single volume, are forbidding. James Gibson's 1976 edition of them runs to 930 pages exclusive of miscellaneous material, and contains 919 individual poems, of which the 117th—located just two places before "The Darkling Thrush"—has, like many others, been overlooked. "Winter in Durnover Field" carries a scenic epigraph which serves to introduce us to a conversation between some inhabitants of that field:

Scene.— *A wide stretch of fallow ground recently sown with wheat, and frozen to iron hardness. Three large birds walking about thereon, and wistfully eyeing the surface. Wind keen from north-east; sky a dull grey.*

(Triolet)

ROOK.— Throughout the field I find no grain;
The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!

STARLING.— Aye: patient pecking now is vain
Throughout the field, I find . . .

ROOK.— No grain!

PIGEON.— Nor will be, comrade, till it rain,
Or genial thawings loose the lorn land
Throughout the field.

ROOK.— I find no grain:
The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!

It may be noted that although Starling and Pigeon are at no loss for words to express this deplorable situation, are eager to be agreeable or hopeful about the future, it is Rook who has the first and the last words, as well as an interpolation in the middle of the poem—"No grain!" Rook doesn't rationalize or understand his predicament; he exclaims, and his emphasis is negative, on what he *doesn't* find. Nor does he feel the need to be social or thoughtful, ruminative or complex: like Hardy in Virginia Woolf's portrait, he is in no doubt or hesitation, having made up his mind.

Why should any poet write such a poem and how are we to understand the kind of sensibility from which it could spring? How do we take "Winter in Durnover Field"? As yet another illustration of Hardy's pessimism? As a winter bagatelle, barely worth pausing over? Perhaps both, though hardly interesting on such counts. It is at least curious and worth remarking how much attention, of a special sort, Hardy has lavished on his little creation. He informs us that it is a Triolet, and its lines are prefaced by careful stage directions even down to the flat information that the field has "large birds walking about thereon." When we try to visualize the scene it turns into an animated cartoon, though not in color; and it is surely hard to devote much energy to teasing out a deeper or thematic significance—one doesn't want to push those large birds out of the way so as to get at some presumed "meaning."

In his slyly composed *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy*, ostensibly

written by his second wife, Florence, but in fact written by Hardy himself, he makes, in a chapter dealing with his return to writing poetry in his fifties, an extended statement or defense of his poetic practice. There is an often-quoted plea for the importance of "cunning irregularity" in poetry, as well as in architecture, the profession of his young manhood. Hardy insists that what critics might mistake for unwitting awkwardness in his poems was in fact contrived and practiced exploitation of the irregular in rhythm. Further evidence is produced to show that he was no mere "apprentice," that he had accumulated many notes on rhythm and meter, and carried out many experiments. He then goes on to emphasize "lastly" what readers have taken to heart even less than the image of him as a craftsman: that he had a "born sense of humour, even a too keen sense occasionally," and that reviewers deficient in that quality were thus at a loss to know how to proceed. He defines this humour as Swiftian rather than Dickensian: "verses of a satirical, dry, caustic, or farcical cast" were the sort he often produced.

Hardy's reputation as an ironist (a collection of his stories is titled *Life's Little Ironies*) adheres mainly to his earlier novel-writing self; while the poetry is praised for possessing a quite opposite effect of deep, if sometimes stumbling and awkward, sincerity. As Donald Davie has pointed out, this is really a way of condescending to him. If Yeats and Eliot and Pound were subtle, allusive, complex, and weighty, Hardy was, well . . . sincere. Anyone who studied poetry in American universities after World War II, in the age of the New Criticism, probably remembers an exciting first encounter with "Sailing to Byzantium" or "Gerontion" or even perhaps with "Maunderley." By contrast, acquaintance with Hardy's poems, if it occurred at all (he was often just omitted from courses, being neither quite Victorian nor quite Modern), was through the more familiarly "poetic" voice of the "The Darkling Thrush," a poem few found too difficult or remote. Certainly no one owned a copy of *Complete Poems*, the volume which any reader of Hardy must learn to live in even though he will never familiarize himself with all of its individual parts. Prolonged immersion in it reveals how persistently interesting and compelling is Hardy's presence.

My way of evoking that presence is to direct attention where it should always be directed when lyric poetry is the subject—to matters of what I call, if confusingly at times, *voice*. When the poet is Yeats one can hardly ignore the voice, or the changing voices, through which his poems speak to us, often speak very loudly to us.

With Hardy, voice is dangerously easy to ignore, to the advantage of neither poem nor reader. We should emphasize further the cunning irregularity of his mind, and the "born sense of humour, even a too keen sense occasionally" which the voice displays or expresses. When, in a word I believe was first used about Hardy's poems by R. P. Blackmur, that voice is anonymous its effect is no less powerful, though harder to specify. There is a nice paragraph of characterization in *The Later Years*, devoted to contesting the notion that Hardy was "simple." No, says the biographer, "he had the formal subtlety peculiar to his own generation; there was something deliberately 'ordinary' in his demeanour which was a concealment of extraordinary fires." These fires burn throughout the poetry.

Hardy's official career as a publishing poet stretches from *Wessex Poems* (1898) to *Winter Words* which appeared in 1928, the year of his death. In *The Later Years* we are told that because of the "misrepresentations" he had suffered from being the author of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, he determined, in 1896, to write no more novels, only poetry. But, he says, these misrepresentations

turned out ultimately to be the best thing that could have happened; for they well-nigh compelled him, in his own judgement at any rate, if he wished to retain any shadow of self-respect, to abandon at once a form of literary art he had long intended to abandon at some indefinite time, and resume openly that form of it which had always been more instinctive with him, and which he had just been able to keep alive from his early years, half in secrecy, under the pressure of magazine writing.

His recent biographer, Robert Gittings, suggests that in addition to whatever frustrations Hardy felt about the public reception of *Jude*, or his wife's distaste for the novel's doctrine as she understood it, he was coming to find the writing of novels a physical burden in their sheer weight of words. Gittings also suggests that the "highly personal themes of his secret youth" could express themselves more judiciously in poems than in novels. Hardy had written a number of poems in the 1860s of which the most impressive was "Neutral Tones"; now, writing seriously again, he began to reap what Ezra Pound called "the harvest of having written 20 novels first," and continued to do so for the last thirty-odd years of his life.

During these years in which Hardy became an ever more honored literary giant, so that by the time Virginia Woolf visited him in 1926 it must have been like going to meet a mythical figure, the most significant event—for our purposes here the sole significant event of his later life—was the sudden death in 1912 of his wife Emma, from whom he had been seriously estranged since the 1890s. Although Hardy enjoyed going up to London, staying at the Athenaeum, attending plays and social gatherings, and although he engaged in a number of romantic affiliations with younger women one of whom was to be his second wife (these affiliations are described by Mr. Gittings with meticulous care and tact), his life became identified with his poetry to an extent only matched among the modern poets by Wallace Stevens. With Yeats or Eliot or Pound, life and poems seem almost equally interesting; with Hardy, particularly with later Hardy, the poet of our concern here, one is interested in the life of the poems.

His career as poet may be divided into three parts, of which the first comprises the work from his first three volumes (*Poems of the Past and Present*, 1901, and *Time's Laughingstocks*, 1909, followed *Wessex Poems*). Some of these poems bear dates from the 1860s and the London addresses where Hardy lived at that time. One group of them flowers out of a visit to Italy and the Continent in the late 1880s; another group, dated 1899, was stimulated by the Boer War; another, larger group is made up of narratives and ballad-like anecdotes in which eternal traits of character are displayed. I pass over these groups without further comment, though they contain many lively and capable performances. But Hardy's most characteristic and finest voice is found in the following shorter poems from these volumes, in order of their appearance in *Complete Poems*: "Neutral Tones," "The Imprecipient," "At an Inn," "I Look Into My Glass," "Drummer Hodge," "The Souls of the Slain," "Rome: At the Pyramid of Cestius near the Graves of Shelley and Keats," "A Broken Appointment," "Wives in the Sere," "The Last Chrysanthemum," "The Darkling Thrush," "The Self-Unseeing," "The Rejected Member's Wife," "The Farm-Woman's Winter," "Shut Out That Moon," and "On the Departure Platform."

The last of these illustrates Hardy's deepest, most pervasive qualities and also points up the peculiar kind of difficulty there is in writing about his art. It is one of his lesser-known poems, presumably written about the woman who was to become his second wife, though such information is of no help in understanding what makes the poem distinctive:

We kissed at the barrier; and passing through
She left me, and moment by moment got
Smaller and smaller, until to my view
She was but a spot;

A wee white spot of muslin fluff
That down the diminishing platform bore
Through hustling crowds of gentle and rough
To the carriage door.

Under the lamplight's fitful glowers,
Behind dark groups from far and near,
Whose interests were apart from ours,
She would disappear,

Then show again, till I ceased to see
That flexible form, that nebulous white;
And she who was more than my life to me
Had vanished quite. . . .

These first four stanzas of the poem tell us what happened, enacting with considerable skill a voice in process of saying how it was that day; and we follow along, participating in the man's "diminishing" perspective, moving from one stanza to the next as "She would disappear, / Then show again. . . ."

The best tribute ever paid to Hardy's poetry was Ezra Pound's in *Guide to Kulchur* (1938) where he made two essential points: "No man can read Hardy's poems collected but that his own life, and forgotten moments of it, will come back to him, a flash here and an hour there. Have you a better test for true poetry?" Whether for "man" here we can read "man or woman" I am not sure, since the perspective of most, though not all, of the poems is a male one. But what clearly animates this particular one is the poet's bringing back to himself a hitherto forgotten moment which he proceeds to rehearse in most delicately careful detail. The final two stanzas ruminate about the experience:

We have penned new plans since that fair fond day,
And in season she will appear again—
Perhaps in the same soft white array—
But never as then!

—‘And why, young man, must eternally fly
 A joy you’ll repeat, if you love her well?’
 —‘O friend, nought happens twice thus; why,
 I cannot tell!’

Hardy may not have found the perfect way to end this lyric—the interpolated question by a “friend” creaks more than a bit—but what comes through most clearly are the exclamatory negatives, particularly the four words “But never as then!” When in Pound’s phrase a forgotten moment comes back to the speaker in a Hardy poem, his truest response to it is to insist upon its uniqueness and the impossibility of repeating it. The exclamation mark is a wonderfully expressive device with which to make this insistence, since along with the regret, the pang of loss when the past moment is viewed in memory’s landscape, there is also a present exhilaration of not merely recalling the moment but of asserting its forever-lostness: “nought happens twice thus,” and so “never as then.”

There is an analogy between this exhilaration and the sort which animated Rook (in “Winter in Durnover Field”) as he kept announcing that throughout the field he found no grain. Or there is “The Rejected Member’s Wife,” a poem about a woman whose husband has been defeated in the parliamentary election; thus she will never again stand smiling in her pain, at his side, waving to the crowd that has rejected him. Other people will come along and go through the same delights of triumph and agonies of defeat:

But she will no more stand
 In the sunshine there,
 With that wave of her white-gloved hand,
 And that chestnut hair.

The poem is secure enough to end with just that much said and no more. Donald Davie speaks of Hardy’s “playful and mournful serenity”; something like that quality is felt in these reiterated pledges that things will not come back, not ever again be the way they once were.

Pound’s other significant point in his tribute to Hardy succinctly locates the difficulty anybody experiences in writing about the poems: “When a writer’s matter is stated with such entirety and with such clarity there is no place left for the explaining critic.” This remark has particular application to Hardy and is not merely

a matter of poet kicking critic out of the way of another poet. Certainly Pound is making use here of terms central to his own way of thinking about what poems should do: they should *present* or state "matter," not write about or describe or strike attitudes toward it. (I am speaking at least of Pound the Imagist, circa 1913.) Yet because of its allusive weight, its diction, the elaborations of its verse structure, there is usually some room or need for the critic of Pound's poetry to do a bit of explaining, even when the poem's "matter" is rather slender. But consider how "The Darkling Thrush" states everything with such clarity as to silence commentary or render it superfluous:

The land's sharp features seemed to be
 The Century's corpse outleant,
 His crypt the cloudy canopy,
 The wind his death-lament.
 The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry,
 And every spirit upon earth
 Seemed fervourless as I.

It is difficult to believe in the fervourlessness of a central presence here, since the poet goes about his task of charting the landscape then announcing the thrush's song, always with such unerring confidence and accuracy. In other words, the poem's "I" is a relatively conventional one, lacking the rich dramatic interest built up around the first person in a poem by Robert Frost, say, or Robert Lowell. Neither the poem's formal properties nor its display of a speaking "I" seem to demand much in the way of explanatory analysis.

On occasion the "explaining critic" inserts himself into the plot of one of Hardy's poems, as in a little-known gem tucked between "The Darkling Thrush" and "Winter in Durnover Field." For five stanzas "The Last Chrysanthemum" sings with elegance about deprivation:

Why should this flower delay so long
 To show its tremulous plumes?
 Now is the time of plaintive robin-song
 When flowers are in their tombs.

Through the slow summer, when the sun
Called to each frond and whorl
That all he could for flowers was being done,
Why did it not uncurl?

It must have felt that fervid call
Although it took no heed,
Waking but now, when leaves like corpses fall,
And saps all retrocede.

Too late its beauty, lonely thing,
The season's shine is spent,
Nothing remains for it but shivering
In tempests turbulent.

Had it a reason for delay,
Dreaming in witlessness
That for a bloom so delicately gay
Winter should stay its stress?

Wordsworth's "The Lesser Celandine" is behind this someplace; and it is not surprising that when Hardy chose to write about a flower he would find one that came too late, had no business being there at all, and was in for a hard season of shivering. This is the flower he can love, just as he can welcome the thrush if it is on its last legs ("Aged," "frail, gaunt and small"), and admire a grainless rook or a rejected member's wife. Yet never does he command a language more "delicately gay" than in this poem's fifth stanza; nor is the question asked a real question. Hardy has stated his matter with such entirety and clarity, has made up the best that can be said for this lonely, lovely chrysanthemum, that anything more is superfluous. So the final stanza of the poem comes as an embarrassing bit of *gaucherie*:

—I talk as if the thing were born
With sense to work its mind;
Yet tis but one mask of many worn
By the Great Face behind.

Here Pound's explaining critic has intruded, reminding us that he's committed the pathetic fallacy, and saluting—under one of its

many names—the Great Face (in other poems it is the Immanent Will or Purblind Doomster). But in truth the poem has already completed itself; its “matter”—the plight of belatedness—has been stated wholly. Nothing Hardy wrote over the ten years following “The Darkling Thrush” requires us to give a radically different account of it, so it is not surprising that critics found more to work on as they observed Yeats’s changing style in the new century’s first decade, or at the end of it encountered the earliest work of Pound. Hardy, who had turned seventy in 1910, could hardly be expected to provide any further surprises.

With various stirrings of new life visible in the volumes of poetry published in and around the year 1914, one might understandably have overlooked the appearance of yet another by Hardy—his fourth book of poems, *Satires of Circumstances: Lyrics and Reveries with Miscellaneous Pieces*, published in November of that year, after England had entered the great war. We learn from J. O. Bailey’s useful handbook on the poetry that the title was supplied by Hardy’s publisher (Macmillan) who took it from his title for the last group of poems in the book, “Satires of Circumstance in Fifteen Glimpses.” These short poems had been published in a magazine in 1911 and took ironic attitudes toward various human foibles and affectations. Hardy was uneasy about the thus-titled volume since, as he says in *The Later Years*, the fifteen earlier “satires” were “caustically humorous productions which had been issued with a light heart before the war”:

So much shadow, domestic and public, had passed over his head since he had written the satires that he was in no mood now to publish humour or irony, and hence he would readily have suppressed them if they had not already gained such currency from magazine publication that he could not do it.

As if to atone, he assures us that the “Lyrics and Reveries” section of the new volume “contained some of the tenderest and least satirical verse that ever came from his pen.”

The domestic shadow which had passed over Hardy’s head was the death of his wife in late November of 1912. During the next few months he wrote the remarkable “Poems of 1912-13,” a group of eighteen lyrics (three more were added later) in response to that death. Although these are placed after the “Lyrics and Reveries”

section of *Satires of Circumstances*, we can safely assume that he thought of them as prime examples of his "tenderest, least satirical verse," and that he worried about how his reputation as professional pessimist and "bitter" portrayal of life's little ironies might deform responses to what were very personal poems. Yet Macmillan's title was really the right one for the volume, and the 1912-13 lyrics are of great interest partly because they are not just tender, do not forego the strengths of his best satirical poetry.

But before taking up these poems and their biographical genesis, two of the most rightly anthologized of Hardy's works deserve attention as fine examples of the "public" poet's satiric strengths. "Channel Firing" and "The Convergence of the Twain" are the second and third poems in the "Lyrics and Reveries" section from *Satires of Circumstances*, but this heading fails to suggest the fabulous quality of each poem and the ambiguous way each reveals Hardy's presence. "Channel Firing" begins quietly and firmly with the voice of a dead man speaking from his coffin in rather four-square fashion:

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel window-squares,
We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. . . .

The man proceeds to relate how God had to reassure these dead people that it was not in fact the Judgment-day but merely the nations preparing for another war (Hardy dates the poem April, 1914), and that since the world was still mad they were not to get their hopes up. At this news the dead subside, one of them, Parson Thirdly, opining that instead of preaching he should have "stuck to pipes and beer." So far it looks to be a satire of circumstance in a familiar Hardyian vein, an exercise turned out with perhaps too much facility. But the final stanza tolls its message:

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

One of Hardy's very best critics, John Crowe Ransom, has nicely pointed out how the meter makes us stress the "henge" in Stonehenge. Ransom paraphrases the end of the poem this way: "Our expectations have been defeated, but we still insist on our moral universe; the roar of the guns prevails, but now it assaults the shrines without effect"; and he concludes that "The thing heard upon the air is evil, but the thing seen is the religious monument hung and illuminated beneath the stars."

There is nothing in the poem that forbids this elegantly humanistic way of understanding it; but suppose instead one chose to emphasize, for the sake of discussion, how *far* the roaring of the guns penetrated. As far as Camelot and Stonehenge, a long way back in history and myth; thus one might read the conclusion in a less affirmative way than Ransom does, and might say instead "Look how far back war goes, learn how it will ever be with us, realize how little there is you can do about it." Different emphases are possible since all the poem's voice does is to declare, with rapt attentiveness and rhythmic power, what the guns are doing. But what everyone can agree about, I should think, is the sense of elevation—mainly through its use of romantic names, places and monuments—achieved by the final stanza, and perhaps felt by Hardy as he composed it. It may be that no statements about Man and War and History are as true as the juxtapositions and repetitions given expression here. Somehow the roaring of the guns ends up feeling dignified; and the reader may find himself entertaining some ennobling thoughts about war, rather than musing regretfully on the folly of mankind.

There is a similarly odd deflection from humanistic attitudes in his famous poem about the *Titanic* disaster. Much has been written in admiration of the marmoreal stanzas in which the great sunken ship is described:

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls—grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent

and through which Hardy, in explaining what happened, carefully prepares the coming together of the ship and its mate:

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

The ending of the poem in which they meet, in which "consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres," is at the least a memorable one. But when we inquire about the reader's cumulative response, I think few would describe it as a sagely grave nodding at the ironical consequence of overwhelming pride and vanity. The "Convergence" is just too much fun to read for such responses seriously to exist; in fact it is but a slight overstatement to compare this poem with another utterance about the *Titanic* sinking, a song whose chorus ends with the ringing declaration "It was sad when that great ship went down" ("Husbands and wives/Little children lost their lives" etc.) to be boomed out with enthusiasm by communal singers who have drunk deep.

By designedly avoiding a personal, thoughtfully elaborated response to War or Disaster; by giving us instead such intricate constructions as "Channel Firing" or "Convergence of the Twain," Hardy appears as an ingenious, highly inventive entertainer, enlivened by the very examples of human folly which in life saddened or horrified him, as when he lost two acquaintances in the *Titanic* disaster. It comes as no surprise then to hear his second wife announce in a letter that her husband is upstairs, "writing an intensely dismal poem with great spirits." These facts may be born in mind when confronting the expressive sadness of "Poems of 1912-13."

In those poems, more than at any other place in his work, we see Hardy writing out of his experience of pain, loss and guilt, to make more dramatic and more "open" utterances than the entertaining and impressively-crafted ones observed thus far. Yet crafted and entertaining they still are. Robert Gittings tells us that in 1891 Emma Hardy had begun the diary which may or may not have been titled "What I Think of My Husband." We shall never know for sure, since upon reading it after her death Hardy committed it to the flames. In 1899 Emma wrote to a woman who had asked her for marital advice, that at age 50 (Hardy was nearly 60) a married man gets restless: "Eastern ideas of matrimony secretly pervade his thoughts and he wearies of the most perfect and suitable wife chosen in his earlier life"—a sentence both touching and comic in its pretense at disinterested worldly wisdom. Whatever Eastern ideas came and went in his head, Hardy formed a number of relationships with other women, and in 1907 met Florence Dugdale, a young Dorset-born girl who was to be his love and his mate after Emma's death.

What we know of Hardy's marriage to Emma in its later years is depressing. Though they lived together at Max Gate, the Dorchester house where Hardy spent the remainder of his life, they saw each other only at dinner and even then, Gittings says, did not speak. Hardy's stays in London were increasingly done on his own. When the Robert Louis Stevensons visited at Max Gate, Mrs. Stevenson afterwards wrote patronizingly of "A pale gentle, frightened little man, that one felt an instinctive tenderness for, with a wife—ugly is no word for it—who said 'Whatever shall we do?' I had never heard a human being say it before." More significantly, it appears that Emma's death might not or need not have been quite so unforeseen as her husband's poems after the event were to claim. She had been visibly suffering from impacted gall-stones, but Hardy managed rather successfully to shut his eyes to her condition. Thus the claim made at the end of "The Going," first of the 1912-13 poems, that "O you could not know/That such swift fleeing/No soul foreseeing—/Not even I—would undo me so" becomes a trifle more problematic if we try to match up the "I" with Hardy the man.

Yet neither embarrassment nor cynical knowingness are helpful attitudes to carry into our reading of these poems; and there is no reason not to affirm, even if it is a difficult and uneasy affirmation, Eliot's separation between the man who suffers and the mind that creates—between the life and the art. One might also note that Emma left behind her another personal manuscript which Hardy also read but did not burn, and which was eventually published—what J. O. Bailey describes as a "childlike but appealing record of Emma's girlhood and youth up to the time of her marriage." The editors of this published manuscript say that reading it "threw Hardy back to that joyful enchanted time, forty years earlier, when they had met and become engaged." Thus the poems originated as much in loving memory as in guilt and bad conscience. At any rate they have been handsomely admired by a number of critics beginning with Middleton Murry in 1921. F. R. Leavis saw them (at least saw "The Voice" and "After a Journey") as standing at the very center of Hardy's distinction as a poet, and called them "a triumph of character." More recent accounts by Douglas Brown and Irving Howe have hailed their imaginative integrity, richness of design, and vocal authenticity. In Brown's words, Hardy succeeds in remaining "most naturally himself when most deeply distressed." If these poems have been praised at the expense of others

which don't spring so directly from Hardy's life, they will now—if we accept his biographer's account of that life—have to pay their own way, create their integrity and authenticity wholly by means of their internal shape and gestures, rather than by their correspondence to external fact. And in these terms they most assuredly succeed.

"The Going," first in the sequence and one of the best, begins gently and with sad playfulness, by reproaching the woman for not letting her husband know she was going to die:

Why did you give no hint that night
That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
You would close your term here, up and be gone
Where I could not follow
With wing of swallow
To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

Now she teases him by seeming to appear "At the end of an alley of bending boughs," and is remembered as the heroine of romance from forty years ago:

You were she who abode
By those red-veined rocks far West,
You were the swan-necked one who rode
Along the beetling Beeny Crest.

The closing stanzas of "The Going" point up most clearly Hardy's distinctive procedure in these poems:

Why, then, latterly did we not speak,
Did we not think of those days long dead,
And ere your vanishing strive to seek
That time's renewal? We might have said,
In this bright spring weather
We'll visit together
Those places that once we visited.'

Well, well! All's past amend,
Unchangeable. It must go.
I seem but a dead man held on end

To sink down soon. . . . O you could not know
That such swift fleeing
No soul foreseeing—
Not even I—would undo me so!

Rhythmically speaking, we note how what they “might have said”—the lines in quotation marks from the penultimate stanza—take on a lilting simplicity which the unsonglike pace of the final verse movingly opposes. Douglas Brown finds the distinction of this, as well as the other elegies, to lie in “*dramatic vitality*” and goes on to make the following interesting remarks:

. . . the peculiar excellence lies in the disengagement of the self. There may be an “I,” named or speaking, for whom this loss has happened; but the grief does not turn inward upon “I, Thomas Hardy” nor ask attention for him.

And he notes that a number of poems in the sequence break off just at the moment when grief threatens to become self-regarding, resulting in an effect that is both human and impersonal, “*dramatic*” and poised.

I agree that “The Going” is an absolutely distinctive Hardy poem, its first-person presence (“while I/ Saw morning harden upon the wall”) felt in more vividly particular ways than that of “The Darkling Thrush” or “On the Departure Platform,” where the focus is importantly somewhere else. But more can be said in explanation of its dramatic life. The poem is dated December 1912, and either the writing of it helped Hardy clarify his feelings about Emma’s death, or they had already been clarified in this letter to Florence Henniker on the 19th of that same December:

In spite of the differences between us, which it would be affectation to deny, and certain painful delusions she suffered from at times, my life is intensely sad to me now without her. The saddest moments of all are when I go into the garden and to that long straight walk at the top that you know, where she used to walk every evening just before dusk, the cat trotting faithfully behind her and at times when I almost expect to see her as usual coming in from the flower-beds with a little trowel in her hand.

This is admirably direct and fully expressed; it also points up, by contrast, the indirection and strangeness of Hardy even at his presumably most “sincere,” as in “The Going.” There his impulse to-

ward the dramatic propels the voice into putting questions which are not put in the letter to Mrs. Henniker. The letter-writer expects her to understand what "delusions" Emma suffered from, and knows it would be "affectation" to deny the differences which had separated the Hardys; nonetheless, his life is now "intensely sad" without her.

But "The Going" looks back and questions the relationship in its less than glorious aspect: "Why, then, latterly did we not speak,/ Did we not think of those days long dead," as the syntax continues into the next line. But within the first line itself, merely "did not speak," an enormous and unanswerable question compared to the what-might-have-been-saids that follow. The "I" is thus precipitated into the bleakness of the last stanza: "Well, well!"—an exclamatory gesture that can be heard in various ways and refuses to be pinned down to any one of them: "All's past amend," and "It must go"—two desperate gestures at saying eternal commonplaces, the saying of which gives little help; the ellipsis after "soon," words having failed him . . . ; and the final exclamation, passionately negative as so often in Hardy: "O you could not know . . . No soul foreseeing—/ Not even I—." In an important way the poem is a satire of circumstance after all, as Hardy's letter is not. To paraphrase: "It's not your fault that you didn't say good-bye to me when you died, though it does seem rather thoughtless of you to have left the world quite so abruptly. I wonder why your illusion suddenly appears before my eyes, deceiving me into thinking you're alive? After all, you *were* the girl of high romance I courted years ago; why when neither of us was speaking much to each other didn't we recall those days?" No wonder the throttled reflections of the last stanza seem the only appropriate way to conclude. One has been instructed in the way this tragic event is also an instance of life's rather large ironies: the irony, the joke, is on the man who's left behind to experience them.

Perhaps the most pleasurable and satisfying effect of reading these poems in sequence is the way they lead up to the great affirmation of "At Castle Boterel." Early in the sequence stands "Rain on a Grave" ("Clouds spout upon her/ Their waters amain/ In ruthless disdain,—") and "I Found Her Out There" ("I found her out there/ On a slope few see/ That falls westwardly")—vigorously expert poems of the fancy which aspire to protect the dead woman from the elements, or somehow spirit her away from Dorset to the Cornwall of her true home. This geographical distinction forms the

basis for Donald Davie's fine account of what he terms the poems' "Dantesque focus"

by which "every natural site has the ethical rank of the rational beings who dwell in it"—[precluding] not just the psychological analysis so brilliant in Meredith's *Modern Love*, but also any moral discrimination, and apportioning of blame between the two partners to a marriage that had gone disastrously wrong. Max Gate is simply the landscape of treason; thereabouts he will betray her, she will betray him. North Cornwall is the landscape of loyalty; thereabouts he will be true to her, she will be true to him. The use of landscape is as starkly emblematic as that.

And he goes on to argue, perhaps with some overstatement, that "remorse" and "reproach" are thus excluded from the poems.

As I understand Hardy's temperament the "Dantesque focus" of these poems is indeed crucial, since his poetry does not typically display the complexities either of psychological analysis or of moral discrimination. Once again, in Pound's terms, to be a poet who states his material with "entirety and clarity" precludes the sorts of tentativeness and qualification necessary—at least as our modern understanding has it—for certain kinds of complexity. One might add that Hardy's strongly-rhymed (not always felicitously so) lines and tight formal stanzas, are also difficult to exploit in ways that half-state or insinuate or suggest in "psychological" terms. For example, in the eighth poem of the sequence, "The Haunter," the dead woman speaks for the first time, confiding in us about the man whom she's hovering near but whose words she can't answer. She lets us know, however, that when she was alive, when she *could* answer, he didn't much want to talk:

When I could let him know
How I would like to join in his journeys
Seldom he wished to go.

And eventually she asks us to "Tell him a faithful one is doing/ All that love can do/ Still that his path may be worth pursuing,/ And to bring peace thereto." It sounds noble; but reread and juxtaposed with "The Voice" which follows, it appears that circumstances have their satirical side, since her pledge of faithfulness ("If

he but sigh since my loss befell him/ Straight to his side I go") is also a pledge not to let him alone.

"The Voice" ("Woman much missed . . .") has been widely admired, is one of Leavis' "great" Hardy poems, yet I doubt that a convincing account can be given of why it is clearly superior to a good many others. Here the man fancies that the woman is calling to him; he can't believe his ears, calls back her "Cornwall" self for inspection once more, then doubts the whole business:

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
Heard no more again far or near?

and sums up:

Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
And the woman calling.

Yes, it is you that I hear; no, it is only the breeze: the final stanza in refusing to choose one over the other (the wind keeps "oozing thin" and the woman "calling") calls a halt to further dramatic development, looks back at itself and names once more the "faltering" hero's situation. It is less a poetry of argued, progressive statement than a talismanic charm which fascinates and enchants by a line such as "Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward," which is nothing less or more than a tour de force of expression. "The Voice" is not notable for moral or psychological discriminations; its circumstantial satire is of more elemental concern and is felt mainly through the element of sound.

But the two masterpieces from the sequence are "After a Journey" and "At Castle Boterel," poems which register most fully, humanly and particularly, the man's recovery of himself in his saying of the most that can be said about his relationship with the dead woman. No longer "faltering forward," there is a leisured amplitude in both poems into which the reader is led, as her spirit leads the man:

Yes: I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;
Through the years, through the dead scenes I have
tracked you;

In "After a Journey" the pursuer's voice is released into speaking with a range of tones, and it can address the "Voiceless ghost" of its first line with a lovely mixture of supplication, teasing reproof, and tender vouchsafing:

What have you now found to say of our past—
Scanned across the dark space wherein I have lacked you?
Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division?
Things were not lastly as firstly well
With us twain, you tell?
But all's closed now, despite Time's derision.

I see what you are doing: you are leading me on
To the spots we knew when we haunted here together,
The waterfall, above which the mist-bow shone
At the then fair hour in the then fair weather,
And the cave just under, with a voice still so hollow
That it seems to call out to me from forty years ago,
When you were all aglow,
And not the thin ghost that I now frailly follow!

The truths about how summer was sweet, autumn not so; of how their relationship didn't maintain its glorious beginning—are true but somehow irrelevant. "All's closed now" has no particular referent but is an absolute gesture of conclusion. Yet the next stanza opens up with a great recovery of powers to the wonderful point where, suddenly, the cave calls out as if from forty years ago (that almost monosyllabic line is itself a wonder!) and where the clichés of romance ("When you were all aglow") now feel fresh and alive. It is the life and power of the poetic imagination to call up and call back the past, which "After a Journey" testifies to especially in its last four lines:

Trust me, I mind not, though Life lours,
The bringing me here; nay, brings me here again!
I am just the same as when
Our days were a joy, and our paths through flowers.

Leavis rightly thinks these lines moving and the poem a "triumph of character." One might add though that the assertion of sameness—"I am just the same as when/ Our days were a Joy . . ."—is also a loyal simplification of the man's character: we have seen the sense in which he isn't the same, in which "Time's derision" has taken its toll. In this poem, being "just the same" is less a condition than a hard-won assertion. We remind ourselves that Hardy was a poet back then, just as he is now in 1913; that forty-five years previously he had written a poem about love gone wrong called "Neutral Tones." The imagination persists, despite time's derision.

"At Castle Boterel" is the companion poem which though less appreciated than "After a Journey" strikes me as even deeper in its commitment to the imagination's persistence and dominion over Nature. What makes the particular expression so interesting here is the way Hardy's voice manages to discover rather than merely assert a truth—a discovery which happens before our eyes and before his too. In a drizzle the man looks behind him at a "fading byway" and it is suddenly replaced by a forty-years-ago scene of "Myself and a girlish form benighted/ In dry March weather." Having climbed the road the couple alight to ease the pony's load, then "it" happens:

It filled but a minute. But was there ever
 A time of such quality, since or before,
 In that hill's story? To one mind never,
 Though it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore,
 By thousands more.

Primaeval rocks form the road's steep border,
 And much have they faced there, first and last,
 Of the transitory in Earth's long order;
 But what they record in colour and cast
 Is—that we two passed.

There is perhaps no more expressive dash in lyric poetry than the one in that last line, as the voice moves all the way from acknowledging, in grandly spacious ways, how much the rocks have "faced" of transitory Nature ("Earth's long order") to another kind of "facing," as the man looks to see what they have to tell him—which is "that we two passed." As human a moment as can be found in Hardy's poems, the concluding stanzas give it further poignancy:

And to me, though Time's unflinching rigour,
In mindless rote, has ruled from sight
The substance now, one phantom figure
Remains on the slope, as when that night
Saw us alight.

I look and see it there, shrinking, shrinking,
I look back at it amid the rain
For the very last time; for my sand is sinking,
And I shall traverse old love's domain
Never again.

No longer, as in "After a Journey," does he cry out "Nay, bring me here again!" The imaginative expenditure has been such as to render further expeditions unwise or unnecessary, certainly anticlimactic. But for the most unillusioned of modern poets to have said this much, to have recorded as a great fact "that we too passed," is Hardy's triumph over his own penchant for the anonymous, also a fine moment in the poetry of our century.

Next day she found that her lover,
Though asked, had gone elsewhere,
And that she had possessed him in absence
More than if there.

—from "In the Marquee"

In his useful and incisive book on the poetry, Samuel Hynes observes that it is easier to characterize Hardy's style by saying what it is *not* than what it is—not lyrical, not melodious, nor spare, nor austere. The "Poems of 1912–13" are his most eloquent efforts in the direction of a strongly individual style; "After a Journey" and "At Castle Boterel" prime examples of vigorous and intense dramatic performances. At the end of the latter poem the voice records a shrinking of a "phantom figure" and vows to "traverse old love's domain/ Never again." The real Hardy lived to write many more poems, some about his relationship with Emma, but never, in respect to the dead woman, with the fullness of "traversing" seen in the 1912–13 group. Perhaps the crowning irony with regard to those poems is that Florence Dugdale, living at Max Gate though as yet unmarried to Hardy, was deeply distressed by the flood of

poems Emma's death had occasioned. While at the same time, the guilt and remorse which so spurred Hardy's creative and elegiac energies were partly in consequence of the attention he had paid Florence over the last five years, at the cost of ignoring—even to her death—his own wife.

Aged seventy-two when he wrote those poems, Hardy was to publish four further volumes which contain some of his finest efforts, as for example "During Wind and Rain," "In Time of the Breaking of Nations," "Midnight on the Great Western," "And There was a Great Calm . . .," "The Fallow Deer at the Lonely House"—and a number of others. He continued to indulge his inclination to say no, not, nor, and other negative affirmations. An oddly humorous moment occurs late in *Complete Poems* when #918 announces itself as "We Are Getting to the End," a poem about the end of "dreams" and unreal expectations about the world, but also (we may feel) about our heroic struggle to read through the previous 917 poems. Poem 919, "He Resolves to Say No More," contains four stanzas whose last lines reveal the following progression: "Yea, none shall gather what I hide!"; "What I discern I will not say"; "What I have learnt no man shall know"; "And show to no man what I see." In other words, any talk about grimness or pessimism of thought in these two final poems, must contend with the quite unmistakable current of wry playfulness and verbal aggressiveness which informs them and strikes us more interestingly than do the grim thoughts themselves—hardly a new thing for Hardy to be thinking.

"Why should not old men be mad?" Yeats asked in the title of one of his own last poems. Hardy's late volumes in their sanity answer that question, though never of course by entertaining it directly. Occupied with his second wife in writing the two-volume autobiography, living on at Max Gate as a famous personage, he kept as always his own company. Robert Gittings provides an amusing instance of this in the form of an anecdote Florence told about accusing her husband of not having spoken to anyone outside the house for twelve days. "I have spoken to someone," said Hardy triumphantly, "the man who drove the manure cart." Much impressed, Florence asked what he said to the man: "Good morning," was Hardy's reply. There exists also a document titled "The Domestic Life of Thomas Hardy," purportedly written by a "Miss E. E. T." who was his parlour-maid near the end of his life. From her reminiscences one takes away gossip like the following:

"Hardy was, in a sense, a negative character whom, one gathers, the staff neither liked nor disliked." We learn that he always spoke "quietly and softly," that he never showed anger, that he sought solitude, played no games, collected nothing. "I think of him as always writing" says "Miss E. E. T."

He was writing mainly about the effects of time as observed and felt in his own life and in the world of nature he became, if anything, increasingly sensitive to and observant of. Yet the real distinction of poems ensuing from this observation lies not in matters of apt imagery or "wise" reflections about life, but in the unearthly detachment with which a voice speaks. Reading through the four volumes from the last ten years of his life, beginning with *Moments of Vision* in 1917, we are struck by the predominance of this toneless voice somewhere from underwater or from beyond the grave, speaking to nobody in particular—though we are permitted to listen—with complete, assured, and impartial authority. Frequently the situation is generalized, pointed even more toward allegory and fable than were the earlier poems. In the concluding words of "Going and Staying," a charming poem published in *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), the lovers look close at Time

And saw his ghostly arms revolving
To sweep off woeful things with prime,
Things sinister with things sublime
Alike dissolving.

It is this impartiality of change and equality of dissolution, despite season or age, that most grips his imagination. In "The Missed Train" (from *Human Shows, Far Phantasies*, 1925) the man thinks back to the time when he traveled home after visiting his lover, missed the train and had to spend the night in a small inn where all night he dreamed about her, feeling both lonely and consoled by her spirit. The poem concludes

Thus onetime to me . . .
Dim wastes of dead years bar away
Then from now. But such happenings to-day
Fall to lovers, may be!

Years, years as shoaled seas,
Truly, stretch now between! Less and less

Shrink the visions then vast in me.—Yes,
Then in me: Now in these.

To use language as “dead” as this and make the result very much the opposite, is an achievement. How much it is necessary and how much we are invited to fill in the blank spaces, the ellipsis, the dash, with inexpressible and unsayable yearnings and musings—one cannot specify. But the familiar words are able to assert, simultaneously, how far behind him is his own past, momentarily recovered in a poem, and how this is not just his but “maybe” anyone’s past: how it’s all different, but always the same in the anonymous community of ultimate things. The last line is perfectly, finally balanced, as in an epitaph, since these are surely the last words.

The late nature poems show another, related kind of anonymity. *Human Shows*, *Far Phantasies* is filled, not surprisingly, with winter scenes, and “A Light Snow-Fall After Frost,” one of Hardy’s least-known, most delightful poems has three stanzas presenting, with great subtlety and particularity, the appearance on a country road of two men seen in succession against the backdrop of a snow-fall. What is concluded from these unextraordinary events?

The snow-feathers so gently swoop that though
But half an hour ago
The road was brown, and now is starkly white,
A watcher would have failed defining quite
When it transformed it so.

Not even the observer-poet, but just “a watcher” who “would have failed” if he had tried to do what nobody in fact has tried to do. To praise a line like the concluding one, with its single “it” doing the work of transformation—whenever it happened—on another “it,” is to recognize Hardy’s strange distinction as a poet. There is no one who writes in quite this way, nor is less likely to be eagerly imitated.

Even when the poem’s “I” bears affiliations with the eighty-some year old man who wrote it, the presence is disengaged, almost spectral. Consider a poem from *Human Shows* with the promising Hardyan title “Nobody Comes”:

Tree-leaves labour up and down
And through them the fainting light

Succumbs to the crawl of night.
Outside in the road the telegraph wire
To the town from the darkening land
Intones to travellers like a spectral lyre
Swept by a spectral hand.

A car comes up, with lamps full-glare,
That flash upon a tree:
It has nothing to do with me,
And whangs along in a world of its own,
Leaving a blacker air;
And mute by the gate I stand again alone,
And nobody pulls up there.

We might remark that if somebody had pulled up there Hardy wouldn't have written a poem about it. Here is "The Darkling Thrush" twenty-four years later, without even the consolations a man might feel in at least imagining a thrush to be aware of some "blessed hope" he himself is not. In this late poem everything is de-poetized: even the heightening at the end of the first stanza consequent upon the repetition of "spectral," and the anapestic lilt, give way to the passing car, so remote an intruder it may as well be characterized with a word Hardy uses only once in the *Complete Poems*—"whangs." In his handbook Bailey softens the poem by suggesting that the man must be feeling "expectation, disappointment, and loneliness" after the car passes. But who is to say? Who can penetrate that "blacker air" or dare to ascribe a tone (sadness? wistful regret? stoic fortitude?) to "And nobody pulls up there"? "A watcher would have failed defining quite/ When it transformed it so," and so must the watcher as reader fail to define quite—in the sense of an understanding, sympathetic comprehension—the feelings (if they can be said to be feelings) of this man alone. In "The Darkling Thrush" he was "unaware"; he is now "mute." It is hard to resist summoning up once more the voice of Rook: "Throughout the field I find no grain."

Hardy had hoped to publish his last volume on his 88th birthday but fell some months short of it, dying peacefully in January of 1928. In his introduction to *Winter Words* he tells us that it is probably his "last appearance on the literary stage" and that it would

be "idle" to pretend he is excited about publishing these poems; still "the pieces themselves have been prepared with reasonable care, if not quite with the zest of a young man new to print." This lively tone also holds us at arm's length, lest we should be too zealous in applying fierce standards of excellence to the volume. Although Harold Bloom has claimed that it shows a sudden and dramatic recovery of Hardy's poetic powers, a look at the volume or volumes published prior to it reveals to me no heightening or diminishment of poetic quality in the final one.

When the poems in *Winter Words* deal most directly with other people they tend to be sensationally morbid in Hardy's blackly humorous way. In the dialogue "Her Second Husband Hears Her Story," a wife relates how she sewed up her drunken first husband in bed, so as to be safe from any possible amorous offerings. The husband consequently dies of a stroke, though whether that too was in her intent she will not say. "Well, it's a cool queer tale!" says second husband gamely, perhaps taking thought for his own future. In "Henley Regatta" a young woman is first presented weeping that she will be unable to go to the Regatta because it is raining; years later, and another Regatta Day, she is "a Regatta quite her own":

Inanely
She laughs in the asylum as she floats
Within a water-tub, which she calls 'Henley,'
Her little paper boats.

And "The Mongrel" is a quite unbearable piece about how a man betrays his dog by tossing him to his death in the harbour so as to avoid paying the dog tax. There are no complications of feelings in these poems; they are strikingly effective, cruel exercises in "pessimism," and they mock their author's prose attempts to show that he was always above such things.

At the other extreme, but issuing from the same sensibility, are the "elemental" poems Hardy wrote all his life but never with quite the simplicity of statement he managed in old age. "Throwing a Tree," once thought to have been the last poem he wrote, does no more than lay down, in alternately rhymed anapests, the cutting down of a tree in the New Forest, concluding this way:

. . . Reached the end of its long

And what do you think of that? the poem seems to be content with saying. There is no statement, no “wisdom” into which the reader can move comfortably; nor does the poem’s surface attempt to charm or engage us. That is part of what Hardy’s final simplicity entails.

Let us end where we began, with birds, and with the poet at his most impersonal, most elemental in his concerns:

These are brand-new birds of twelve-months' growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales,
Nor thrushes.

But only particles of grain,
And earth, and air, and rain.

Here one notices the artful, subtle rhyme-pattern and appreciates how entire was Hardy's commitment to rhyme; yet we read the poems scarcely noticing the rhyming cement that holds them together in a central way. And as the "as if" moment of the first stanza is trumped once more by the deeply-stressed negatives of the second, ending up with an "only"—"only particles"—that leaves us to do what we will with the miracle of life and its evanescence, we can echo and extend Pound's comment on Hardy's poetry: "Now *there* is a clarity. There is the harvest of having written 20 novels first." "Proud Songsters," poem #816 in the *Complete Poems*, is the harvest of having written roughly 815 poems first.

EMILY GROSHOLZ

Letter from Germany

Though it is only February, turned
less than a week ago,
and though the latitude is upward here
of Newfoundland's north shore,
Mother, spring is out. It's almost hot,
simmering above and underground,
and in my veins! where your blood also runs
The hazels dangle down
green flowery catkins, and the alders too,
those bushy, water-loving trees,
have a like ornament, in purple-red.
Spring is so forward here.
Snowbells swing in garden beds;
the pussy willows that you liked to bring
inside, to force their silver fur,
are open in the air;
witch hazel in the formal park,
still leafless, wears a ribbon-petalled bloom
of yellow and pale orange.
Once or twice I've walked through clouds
of insects by the river to the east
of town; the ducks are back on the canal
now that the ice is gone, loud and in love.
I wish that I could bring you here
to see this fast, unseasonable spring;
I wish that I could write a letter home.
But since a year you are not anywhere,
not even underground,
so that the words I might have written down
I say aloud into the atmosphere
of pollen and fresh clouds.
I say the litany of my desires,
and wonder, knowing better, if you hear
through some light-rooted organ of the air.

The Metaphysicians

When through circumstance,
steely accident, the world's rule,
lovers deny themselves the copula
of flesh, then it is true
that abstracter conduits
carry out the body's wish.
Atmospheres of breath,
direction of the eye,
words' intonation, fingers' drift
metamorphose
in the service of love.

Then everyday relations
grow erotic, extreme,
doubled in significance;
gestures, looks and words
transfer as in a dream
the sense of one desire
into another. For we are
not creatures of necessity,
compelled to have or not to have;
pleasures we deny ourselves
may change in kind and keep, removed,
their pitch in a new range.

So restrained are you and I,
all our community
is just the globe of air
scored by musical designs,
our liaison nothing more
than great circles drawn
and spanned by desire.
Still we discover
more than substantial charms
when our spheres coincide,
and the broken center swarms

with silent tumult suddenly
like the eye of a storm.

Between lovers in the flesh
distance at every stage persists,
and continues to divide
when the copula is made.
So the formal boundary of sex
which we have never passed,
is just lovers' difference
made corporeal.
To you I swear, my body,
strictly beyond your touch,
only more and more
cleaves to the barrier
and is yours already.

LEWIS TURCO

The Ferry

Maine, 18th c.

The cable bows downward,
touches the surface at midstream,
then curves to the far bank—

there, all is the same: the same woods
receding from the dock, squeezing the gravel track
to a certain point under the horizon.

The river is in flood, the water muddy.
Under the pier the pilings are in jeopardy.
Carp hug the eddy bottoms.

The barge pulls at its ties, strains the cable
running through its eyes along the gunwale.
A smoky crane blows downstream

against its will, tacking westward
like the eroding light.
To the east dusk is breaking

along the road, submerging the forest,
touching toward a clearing where light
swims in a window, washes

into the dooryard: a pump, a trough,
a stack of wood, an axe,
its head glinting in a cleft.

The cable hums in the gale,
its fibres binding silence to silence.
The bell on the pier utters a note.

When its mate responds on the far crossing
night will fall in cataract,
the halves of earth be sundered and set adrift.

PATRICIA SHEPPARD

The Enlightenment

The woods have a way of slanting light,
so one can see into its solitude,
into the deep green of fully developed spring,
to the deepest shade of green that is not black.

A mote of dust becomes irradiated,
drifting down the light beam
and through its edge,
musical,

the way it slips into harmony
with the light, like a note
heard inside the composer's mind,
without the flourish of being sounded.

Trace the dance of dust back
to every degree of green.
There is this life.
Make of it what you will.

JOHN SIMON

The Elephant Man

The Elephant Man, by Bernard Pomerance, an American living in London, has won both the Drama Critics' Circle and Antoinette Perry (Tony) Awards for best play of the season, and, for all I know, some of those other, lesser awards that attach themselves to major-prize-winning plays, turning every theatrical meteor into a comet. The play is a decent effort to write something literate, symbolic, significant—Brechtian, yet more feelingful than the typical Brecht play, and the aim is, to some extent, achieved in the first act. In the second (and last), however, things fly apart; neither the center nor the periphery can hold.

The play is based on the real-life story of John Merrick, known as the Elephant Man. This victim of neurofibromatosis, a congenital disorder, was hideously deformed in almost every part of the body by that condition, which affected nerves, bones, and skin. Curvature of the spine and a lame hip further disabled him. As Frederick Treves, the brilliant surgeon who became his savior was to put it, Merrick was "the most disgusting specimen of humanity that I have ever seen." Despite his extensive experience with "deformities . . . mutilations and contortions," as the aging Treves was to write in a memoir of Merrick in 1923, he had never met "such a degraded and perverted version of a human being." Treves's description of Merrick, which Pomerance incorporates in his play, evokes an "enormous and misshapened [*sic*] head. From the brow there projected a huge bony mass like a loaf, while from the back of the head hung a bag of spongy, fungous-looking skin, the surface of which was comparable to brown cauliflower. On the top of the skull were a few long lank hairs. The osseous growth on the forehead almost occluded one eye. The circumference of the head [though Merrick was a slight man] was no less than that of a man's waist. From the upper jaw there projected another mass of bone. It protruded from the mouth like a pink stump, turning the upper lip inside out and making the mouth a mere slobbering aperture. . . . The nose was merely a lump of flesh. . . . The face was no more capable of expression than a block of gnarled wood. The back was horrible, because from it hung, as far down as the middle of the thigh, huge, sack-like masses of flesh covered by the loathsome cauliflower skin." I will spare you the similarly nauseating description of the rest of the man, but two further things need mentioning: Merrick also exuded a dreadful stench, though that was later checked by regular baths; and, by way of a left-handed compliment from nature, his left arm and hand were delicate, almost girlish, and quite unaffected by his disorder.

John Merrick was abandoned by his family, grew up in the Leicester workhouse, suffered from impeded speech, was exhibited by showmen at various sideshows as far afield as Belgium, only to be rescued in the nick of time by Frederick Treves, who, with the approval of his committee

chairman, Carr Gomm, put him up for life in 1886 at the London Hospital in Whitechapel. Here Merrick spent his last years until his death at twenty-seven in 1890. By that time he was the celebrated darling of high society whose members visited him frequently and showered him with gifts. Within a week from publication of a letter to the *Times*, the British public contributed the money needed for his lifelong upkeep. The carnival freak who had been the object of jeers, laughter, and insults ended up well cared for, favored even by royalty. He had come to love the theater, into which he would be smuggled—masked and cloaked, through secret passages, and seated in the back of a box—through the kind offices of Mrs. Kendal, a gracious leading actress of the day. He read a lot, worshiped women from afar (his genitals, alas, were unimpaired), and built with his good left hand a very fine model of St. Philip's Church, an edifice he could see from his hospital window. According to Treves, he often repeated "I am happy every hour of the day." And yet he died by what was some sort of suicide. Because of the weight of his head, he could not sleep lying down, only propped up with pillows and with his brow resting on his raised knees. One day he elected to sleep as he frequently said he wanted to, like ordinary people. This caused rupture or compression of the spinal cord and death.

Pomerance has fashioned this material—which his brother found for him in Ashley Montagu's *The Elephant Man*—into a concise, fast-moving play—at least in its first act. In a prefatory remark, the playwright notes that Merrick's building of the model of the church should dominate the play and constitute its central metaphor. Moreover, "any attempt to reproduce [Merrick's] appearance and voice naturalistically—if it were possible—would seem . . . not only counterproductive, but, the more successful it was, the more distracting from the play. For how he appeared, let slide projections suffice." And an illustrated lecture by Treves forms, accordingly, part of the play. But here we run into a difficulty, especially as Merrick is portrayed on Broadway—by a very handsome, usually near-naked, actor, who merely muffles his voice slightly and sometimes assumes a twisted posture. We are, presumably, to see objectified the beauty of the man's soul. But this strategy puffs up the audience with a cheap feeling of superiority. *They* would not have, as parents, cast out the poor wretch; *they* would not have, as impresarios, subjected him to every sort of humiliation and stolen his last few shekels; *they* would not have, as policemen, reviled and brutalized him; *they* would not have, as trained nurses, run screaming from his room; *they* would not have, as hospital orderlies, come to gape at him with unholy curiosity. *This Elephant Man*, after all, is nothing short of a darling boy.

Pandering to the audience is bad enough, but Pomerance also leans heavily in the opposite direction. He minimizes or omits many of the decencies that were, in actuality, shown Merrick even by some very ordinary people, and he makes virtually all of Merrick's prosperous, highly-placed friends and patrons appear suspect: either they profit from the *Elephant Man* directly or indirectly, or they can project their private problems onto him and, seeing him cheerful in adversity, feel purged

through him. The simultaneous sparing and not sparing of the audience gives the play an unpleasant having-it-both-ways character.

To drive home his antisocietal stance, the dramatist starts out with a Treves who is much more smug and Victorianly hypocritical than the real Treves was, and ends with a Treves profoundly shaken by doubts such as his real-life counterpart never had. This would, of course, be all right, if only the fictive Treves came by this transformation convincingly. In an early scene, Treves does not understand what Carr Gomm means when he refers to worldly success as a "consolation prize"; he sees himself as having "excessive blessings." But early in the second act Treves says of Merrick: "That, as he rises higher in the consolations of society, he gets visibly more grotesque is proof definitive he is like me. Like his condition, which I make no sense of, I make no sense of mine." (That last sentence does not parse, but never mind for the moment.) As the play progresses, Treves's hatred for social success, and thus also for himself, grows in intensity, till, toward the end, the man who taught Merrick that we live by rules, and that rules make us happy, laments: "I am an extremely successful and respected Englishman in a successful and respected England which informs us daily by the way it lives that it wants to die. I am in despair, in fact."

What has happened in the play to warrant such a change of attitude? Little if anything. At one point, Treves seems to have become embroiled in the shady financial speculations of an aristocrat—Lord John, an obviously fictitious character—who has feigned interest in Merrick. All this is barely hinted at, yet it is meant to imply that Treves has somehow abused his patient. Also, Mrs. Kendal, whom Treves summons to bring feminine grace to the deprived Merrick, becomes ever fonder of that gifted unfortunate. One day, during one of her frequent, friendly visits, she feels so strongly for this youth who worships women without ever having seen one of them naked, that she lets down her hair and disrobes to the waist for him. Merrick is ecstatic, but Treves enters and, scandalized, chases Mrs. Kendal away. We don't know what would have happened without this intervention; as it is, Mrs. Kendal never returns and Merrick goes into a decline from which he never recovers. But are these two lapses of Treves's enough, under any circumstances, to turn the surgeon from a contentedly righteous, socially rising Englishman into a bitter and desperate prophet of doom? In the kind of echo effect Pomerance loves, Treves reaches out pleadingly to the same Bishop How whom he has previously been mocking, and cries out, "Help me!"—exactly as Merrick had clasped him, Frederick Treves, five years ago, with the identical cry for help.

We simply do not see the reasons for Treves's moral and political change, except that Pomerance obviously intends some kind of Hotspur-Hal relationship, whereby as Merrick rises, Treves sinks. But, to complicate matters, Pomerance also wants to stress the parallel between the supposedly normal and the supposedly abnormal man, so that he must make Merrick's rise into a fall as well. Treves—or Pomerance—worries about Merrick: "His heart won't sustain him much longer. . . . It is the overarc [*sic*] of things, quite inescapable that as he's achieved greater and

greater normalcy [again Pomerance's bad English, a problem throughout], his condition has edged him closer to the grave." But the play does not show him as visibly closer to death; rather, Merrick thrives on his improved conditions, and there is no evidence that relative normality brings him any other grief except, probably, that of never becoming a woman's lover. Is this what finally kills him?

The cause of the Elephant Man's death seems to me the key problem of the play, yet it remains unresolved in a manner that does not leave me with an aftertaste of provocative ambiguity but of depressing vagueness. Treves's just-quoted speech continues: "So . . . a parable of growing up? To become more normal is to die? More accepted, to worsen? He . . . it is just a mockery of everything we live by." But, I repeat, the play fails to connect either growing up or increased normality with dying—unless maturity and normality mean making love to a woman. This is what Ross, the sleazy impresario who exhibited Merrick as a freak and even cheated him out of his measly earnings, cruelly implies in a scene in which Ross, dropping in on the now relatively prosperous Merrick, asks for a percentage of the emoluments the latter receives from his rich well-wishers. He claims to have discovered Merrick and helped him survive; he further claims that nothing has changed—that Treves merely exploits Merrick on a grander scale than he, Ross, was able to do. The dukes and fine ladies who come to see Merrick do so to "feel good about themselves by comparison" and John is still a whore, like most people—which is "no disgrace. . . . Disgrace is to be a stupid whore." When Merrick protests that he is now a normal man, like others, Ross nastily inquires: "Had a woman yet? MERRICK: Is that what makes a man? ROSS: In my time, it'd do for a start. MERRICK: Not what makes this one. Yet I am like others."

Well, is he or isn't he? When the author makes Merrick refuse Ross even a small handout—which the latter certainly does not deserve—is he making Merrick into one of the exceptional, truly just beings, or merely an ordinary practitioner of tit for tat, like most other people? And is it only Ross's taunt that stings him, in the very next scene, to play on Mrs. Kendal's sympathy (or is it something bigger?) till she undresses for him? And what would have happened if Treves had not burst in on that scene, which Mrs. Kendal describes as "For a moment . . . Paradise"? In an earlier scene she had described her glamorous persona as not truly herself but an illusion, would she now, revealing herself and saying, "No illusions!" (another Pomerantian echo effect), have gone all the way? From what we know of the highly respectable woman that the historic Mrs. Kendal was, even this much is inconceivable. But Pomerance's Mrs. Kendal is more equivocal. Yet whatever she might have done, such an act of alleged supreme kindness might be taken, by both Merrick and the rest of us, as a terrible piece of sexual teasing. With or without a *noli me tangere*, Merrick is raised to Paradise all too literally for only a moment, to be hurled back forthwith to a greater sense of deprivation than ignorance, even if it is not exactly bliss, could ever inflict. Mrs. Kendal, who goes a bit too facilely from her initial extreme actressiness to subsequent ripe femininity, is confirmed in her ambiguousness by her failure to see Mer-

rick again after the unfortunate incident. Is it her sense of guilt and shame or Treves's prohibition that keeps her away? Neither, under the circumstances, should be a sufficiently strong deterrent. And why does Treves want to keep her from Merrick? Is it simple jealousy or an act of wise prescience? His stated motive, muttered to himself out of John's ear-shot is, "Because I don't want her here when you die." Yet how can he foresee a death that is essentially suicide? And, in any case, why should Mrs. Kendal not be a comforting presence at Merrick's end? We are clearly getting out of the realm of creative ambiguity into that of stultifying confusion. Even the character of Carr Gomm, the wise administrator, has a way of changing from his early cogency to later cynicism, further suggesting that the dramatis personae are too much at the service of the drama, and not enough at that of true personality.

To be sure, Pomerance can write nice lines and even good scenes. Take this bit of dialogue: "MERRICK: . . . Sometimes I think my head is so big because it is so full of dreams. Because it is. Do you know what happens when dreams cannot get out? MRS. KENDAL: Why, no. MERRICK: I don't either. Something must." The first sentence, largely because it was part of the play's publicity campaign, has become the most famous line from *The Elephant Man*; it is a good one, but I like what follows even better. The repetition of "Because it is" is childlike and touching, as is that hopeful-hopeless "Something must." But the dialogue can also get too good, as in the second-most-cited line of the play. Carr Gomm has just fired an orderly who, strict instructions to the contrary notwithstanding, has been gawking at Merrick. Treves explains to his patient that relieving him of importunate stares was a merciful act, even if the orderly was badly in need of his job. Replies Merrick: "If your mercy is so cruel, what do you have for justice?" That, first of all, is far too sophisticated a remark for Merrick so soon after his reclamation by Treves. What is worse, though, is that it corroborates a problematic attitude I have already mentioned: Pomerance's war against the upper classes, which is one of the main themes, but not really supported by the story, inasmuch as high society and the bourgeoisie did far better by Merrick than the lower orders from which he came, his own family included. Pomerance's dividedness is epitomized by such a line: are we to sympathize with Merrick's censure of society or with Gomm's act which was meant to be only just, not merciful?

We are now back to the split that runs through the entire work and sometimes leads Pomerance very far astray. Take the scene in which Merrick begins to win over Mrs. Kendal with his critique of *Romeo and Juliet*, which he has just finished reading. Had *he* been Romeo, says John, he would not just have held the mirror to Juliet's breath. To which the experienced actress, who has played Juliet, replies, "You mean the scene where Juliet appears to be dead and he holds a mirror to her breath, and sees . . ." "Nothing," interjects Merrick, who then proceeds to blame Romeo for rashly killing himself. He, Merrick, would also have taken her pulse, sent out for a doctor. Romeo, however, kills himself for an illusion, which "fools him because he does not care for her. . . . That is not love. It was all an illusion. When the illusion ended, he had to kill himself." Ex-

claims Mrs. Kendal: "Why, that is extraordinary." And so it is—because nowhere in Shakespeare's play does Romeo hold a mirror to Juliet's breath, which Mrs. Kendal, with Juliet in her repertory, must clearly know. (So, by the way, must our drama critics, yet none of them has commented on this oddity.) What is going on here? Pomerance is obviously trying to make Merrick into a superior being, a romantic superman who out-Romeos Romeo. But in the process he unconsciously (I assume) rewrites Shakespeare's scene, perhaps confusing it with the one in which Lear holds a feather to the dead Cordelia's breath. But, in any case, should Merrick be so exalted and idealized, to say nothing of the literary legerdemain involved? Furthermore, the scene is forced into the "illusion" refrain that echoes through the play: Mrs. Kendal's first description of herself as a stage illusionist, then revealing herself naked, without illusion. Here, in between those poles, we are reminded again that when illusion ceases, we must die—as Merrick, apparently, kills himself out of unrequitable love for the once unveiled Mrs. Kendal—which would make him a kind of Romeo, after all.

Well, that is one of the big difficulties with the play: Pomerance does not quite know what Merrick means to him, or else he wants to make him stand for too many things. He is obviously the Beast in an updated version of the Beauty and the Beast fairy tale; he is also the Noble Savage, a concept too threadbare to stand further updating or even plain reiteration. He is, furthermore, the Artist in a mundane, materialistic society. Noticing the model of St. Philip's he is building, Mrs. Kendal remarks, "You are an artist, John, an artist." And presently Merrick declares that he did not start building until he "saw what St. Phillip's [*sic*, throughout] really was. It is not stone and steel and glass . . . it is an imitation of grace flying up and up from the mud. So, I make my imitation of an imitation. But even in that is Heaven to me, Mrs. Kendal." The artist, then, as imitator of the mystic or saint, and Merrick is indeed shown as a true Christian. Yet even here Pomerance is split, for he allows John to criticize the God who made him (with a wry allusion to the fact that he, Merrick, can use only his good left hand): "He should have used both hands, shouldn't he?" This is another echo effect recalling Carr Gomm's reply to Bishop How, who had proudly declared that *God* knew what to do with the Elephant Man even as Darwin did not; retorted Gomm: "He'd better, sir; he deformed him."

So we get Merrick the artist and believer amid a crass and unbelieving society. And there is, of course, Merrick the social, political, psychological scapegoat of the Establishment. "We have polished him like a mirror, and shout hallelujah when he reflects us to the inch," says Treves. "I have grown sorry for it." And as if all this were not enough, there is also a surreal use of Merrick in a dream sequence, where Treves is dreaming an inverted—as it were, mirror—world. Here a healthy and normal Merrick lectures about the merely allegedly normal Treves, and, using a travesty of the language in which Treves described the Elephant Man's anomalies to a medical gathering, turns Treves's so-called normality and adjustment into objects of justified scorn—Pomerance's social iconoclasm again.

If we now return to the crucial question of the cause of Merrick's death, we face the conflicting interpretations that the various symbolic meanings dictate. Here we must ask ourselves again about that liminal note in which Pomerance asserted that the "building of [the model] constitutes the central metaphor. The groping towards the conditions where it can be built and the building of it are the action of the play." If this is true (and an author is not always the best judge of his work), the play is about artistic or civilizational fulfillment, which permits the incomplete being—Elephant Man or Everyman—to die in a state of completeness. But, then, what is all that stuff with Mrs. Kendal and the end of illusion—or love—about? Consider, furthermore, Merrick's words as he finishes the model: "It is done." Surely this is also the *Consummatum est* of Christ on the cross, which, in another display of the Pomerantian echo chamber, recurs at the very end. Treves, to Carr Gomm's routine inquiry whether he has anything to add to the obituary notice Gomm is sending to the *Times*, decides at first that he has nothing to add. In the very last exchange of the play, however, Treves announces, "I did think of one small thing," but Carr Gomm answers, "It's too late. It is done." *Consummatum est*, again. So we get Merrick as a Christ figure as well.

All rather confused, I am afraid, and not a little pretentious. For a play to be able to get away with such a load of ambiguity, it must, at the very least, have so poetic a diction that the language supplies its own certainties where human wisdom, knowledge, rational insight fail. How often have we found consolation in some little phrase we repeat to ourselves over and over in times of stress? Well, great poetry or prose works in a similar way: its lapidary precision, its suggestive resonance, its order imposed on disorder make up for the fact that it is not a poultice for uncertainty, suffering, transience. But Pomerance's language is often unintentionally ungrammatical, awkward, and, except in occasional felicitous stretches, less than incantatory or compelling.*

Four further things disturb me. First, the scene (12) in which all the play's major characters file past Merrick and project, in rather schematic speeches, their own views of themselves onto him. This litany-like effect appears to me to derive too slavishly from Shaw's Epilogue to *Saint Joan*. Next, I could do without the portentous titles affixed to each scene, e.g., "Art Is as Nothing to Nature," "Mercy and Justice Elude Our Minds and Actions," "When the Illusion Ends He Must Kill Himself." Thirdly, and relatedly, there is a tendency to build up each of the play's twenty-one fairly short scenes toward a punchline that can be pungent or poignant, but is as often ponderous; in any case, the procedure palls after a while. A typical early scene, for example, ends as follows: "GOMM: So he [Merrick] will be like us. Ah. TREVES: Is something wrong, Mr. Gomm? With us?" Again, the otherwise apt and sparkling scene (9) between Treves and Mrs. Kendal ends with her discovery that the Elephant Man has a normal penis because, as Treves explains awkwardly, there are no bones in

* A detailed discussion of this requires more space and will have to wait until my next column.

that organ. "MRS. KENDAL: Well. Learn a little every day, don't we? TREVES: I am horribly embarrassed. (He looks at Mrs. Kendal.) MRS. KENDAL: Are you? Then he must be lonely indeed." And the lights fade on this rather too tidy, too facile summation. Or take the penultimate scene (20), which begins with Snork, a hospital orderly, reflecting to Merrick about the chanciness of life. Snork is looking for another, better word, but cannot summon it up. Later he enters triumphantly: "I remember it, Mr. Merrick. The word is 'arbitrary.' 'Arbitrary.' It is all so . . ." Whereupon he notices that the Elephant Man is dead and rushes out proclaiming the news. Blackout. Now, that sort of thing is just too pat. The arbitrariness of Merrick's malformation and the arbitrariness of human existence are surpassed here by the arbitrariness of Pomerance's dramaturgy.

Finally, I must call attention to certain tendentious omissions from Merrick's story as Sir Frederick Treves told it in his last book, *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (1923). I find particularly fascinating the silver-fitted dressing-bag that Merrick asked Treves to buy him for Christmas. Neither the bag nor any of the elegant toilet articles in it could be of the least use to Merrick, who, for instance, could neither shave nor use an ordinary toothbrush, and certainly could not smoke the cigarettes in the silver case. But, as Treves notes, it "was an emblem of the real swell and the knockabout Don Juan of whom he had read. So every day Merrick laid out upon his table, with proud precision, the silver brushes, the razors, the shoe-horn and the silver cigarette-case. . . . The contemplation of these gave him great pleasure, and such is the power of self-deception that they convinced him he was the 'real thing.'"

This is very touching, but missing from the play. I suppose it would have seemed to Pomerance to reduce his hero's stature to something less superior to the rest of the world, something less heroic. Self-deception, as Pomerance wants it, is chiefly for the Establishment. And so he also neglects to analyze the true cause of Merrick's "suicide," and seems to settle for Treves's statement that it "was due to the desire that had dominated his life—the pathetic but hopeless desire to be 'like other people.' " But this runs counter to the nobler mold in which he has cast the rest of his hero's behavior—hence the Mrs. Kendal-unrequited-love motif, the artist-who-has-finished-his-work motif, and all the others. Still, to leave out the ritual of the silver-fitted dressing-bag appears to me to diminish Merrick rather than to magnify him. Arbitrary—the word is arbitrary.

VERNON YOUNG

Film Chronicle: Trash and Poetry

AFTER A FULL HOUR during which those hooligans in *The Deer Hunter* have poured themselves through an interminable wedding, shot their deer, despoiled the landscape with their cloacal rudiments of speech and spilled beer over one another as they sprawl on pool tables, I told myself I didn't care *what* happened to such moral quadrupeds going to war on a foreign strand. In the event, I *did* care, because they were flesh and blood submitted, within the terms of the script, to an ordeal by the Viet Cong so excruciating that it took a strong mind to watch it, as it had taken a tough stomach to endure the exposition of that way of life they were presumably fighting to preserve. The Vietnam sequences were shot with intransigent brutality and a no-dodging closeup style which can scarcely leave unmoved anyone not made of wood. The initial Russian Roulette gambit is a nightmare which will probably stay in the memory to help salvage, when recalled, the remainder of the scenario. And the development of this episode into thematic climax is by far the most persuasive symbol evoked by a screen writer on the Vietnam subject. The nice American, now an addict of the revolving-chamber fever, living in a concentrated daze of hate and hallucination, stays on, beyond all hope of "winning"; when his would-be savior returns to Saigon to tell him it's hopeless, let's-get-out-of-here, he breaks into a smile of postponed recognition, pleads, "One more shot?"—and blows his brains out.

There's your Vietnam epic and if that had been *it*, the film complete, without all the *Godfather*-ethnic introduction and the tailing anticlimaxes, we might have applauded Michael Cimino and his co-scenarists on having shaped something stark, laconic and unappealing from one of the great disasters. But his overall film is hopelessly cluttered with behaviour he leaves uninterpreted and with parentheses which are merely booby-traps for those who believe that every foot of a Hollywood film is susceptible to reasonable inference. (To *logical* inference, commercially motivated, it may be susceptible!) I'd like to think that Cimino's depiction of his characters before they get the hell out to Vietnam was filmed in a spirit of pathos, as who should say: this is the workaday American's tragedy; he lives without language or amenities or any but consumer aspirations; his horizons are the pool hall and the bowling alley (they forgot the

¹ Chances are that in American films, especially, the most anomalous moments have been imposed by the producer but film critics, as a rule, blissfully unaware of how movies are made, persist in the illusion that everything you see was the clear intent of the director; hence, the idiotic rationalizations they are forced to construct in order to explain what they don't actually know or to defend what may be indefensible and may not be the responsibility of the man to whom they are attributing the error—or the inspired touch! *The Deer Hunter* is a snare to us all, since Michael Cimino is listed as one of its three screenplay writers and one of four producers!

TV!); he is sentimental about the immigrant old folks, refers to women except his own, whom he keeps on a leash, as pieces of ass, befouls his saving wilderness and is suddenly shipped to Vietnam for reasons inadequately provided which, if they were adequate, he would be unlikely to understand. The pity of it all!

But *was* this Cimino's point of view? *I don't know!* I fear not. I suspect that either he doesn't see these men as grossly limited or that he would fiercely defend their limitations, even though their lives are benighted—or again, that he was outvoted at a producer-writer conference! What *are* the deer-hunter interludes all about? If Cimino was sensitive enough to give us glimpses of that high-altitude hush of primal innocence, why did he think they needed a full male chorus to underline them? Of the second hunt, when Mike comes back from overseas, even a 15-year-old, or a teacher of film in an American college, would get the point: that the men who stayed at home are still belching, swearing and slaying; it's the veteran hero who refrains from shooting his stag—he's had his share of death. What's the moral? That only a Vietnam war can teach the noble lesson of ecology? Cimino *couldn't* have meant that!

His Robert De Niro character gave him a lot of trouble, that's for certain. If Mike, upon his return, is so modest that he ducks out of the reception prepared for him, why does he nevertheless show up everywhere thereafter in his decorated uniform? (I'll agree that he *looked* better wearing it!) Why, after that initial scene with Stephen's woman—which was very nicely done—did we need to be told that he would eventually inherit her? When first importuned he demurs, assures her that he feels too mixed up and leaves in a panic. Yet two minutes later we see him in bed, if not *with her* in bed, in bed in the same motel room. Did a script writer just then recall that earlier in the film John Casale had asked De Niro if he wasn't a faggot, and that he'd better indicate to the audience—if this is sufficient indication!—that Casale was just shooting off his sad mouth?

The finale? that gathering around the table, including the legless veteran, as they haltingly try to sing "God Bless America." Was Cimino being sardonic? How can I believe so, since he has supplied us with other instances of "My country, 'tis of thee," including the flames of the eternal steel mill which suggested to me a Vietnam at home but might have been luminous tokens of gainful employment?—and that asinine exchange in the Vietnam hospital when the doctor asks, understandably, if the soldier's name isn't Russian and gets the humorless answer, "*It's Amurican!*" . . . *The Deer Hunter* is not unimpressive at its peaks of rawness but in the main it's a moral blockbuster—America Was Promises—like *Days of Heaven* in this respect. Terence Malick's film was structured on the old I.W.W. and Marxist class-struggle format, whereas *The Deer Hunter* is characterized by an unresolved chauvinism, submitted to a multi-talent syndicate which, among other things, has frustrated my eagerness to locate the source of the film's disparities.

From this film, as from many others, one probability emerges. Within five years, American actors, already the world's worst speakers of their own language, will need no vocabulary save a half-dozen words that de-

fine the excretory and copulative functions. The collaboration of political democracy with obscene language was clearly evinced in *All the President's Men*, probably not the first but a conspicuous example of such alignments. From beginning to end, the two liberal investigators (Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford) maintained a non-stop flow of invective; no one they were investigating spoke an off-color word. In *The China Syndrome* the pattern is duplicated. Within five minutes, Jane Fonda, a crusading TV interviewer, has exclaimed "Shit!", which is designed to reassure the audience of her social availability. Her cameraman (played by Michael Douglas, an obnoxious actor if ever I saw one, and have I ever?), a ferret more diligent by far than Fonda, is given some of the foulest lines in the movie, while the plutocrats who are trying to hush up their atomic reactor crisis never answer in kind.² God was unwittingly on the side of the producers in this case. Coincidental with the film's first appearance in New York, the Three-Mile Island scandal was exposed. I saw *The China Syndrome* with a house-full of paranoid citizens who yelled or clapped their approval of every hate-the-rich-executive innuendo and on every frequent occasion when Douglas repeated Miss Fonda's terse judgment of things or added "Fuck you" and "Sonofabitch" to his repertoire.

This debasement of language goes beyond the newly liberated conventions of film, and the breakdown of class barriers is only a partial explanation. In an essay which now seems to me one of the most valuable published in this magazine ("Ideas of Ugly," *THE HUDSON REVIEW*, Spring 1974), Robert Martin Adams astutely defined the connection between the individual's consent to obscenity and the fortuity of the historical moment, together with the origins of consent in the Rousseauistic doctrine of candor, today's opium of the literal-minded:

... if shit—both the word, the substance, and the self-corruption that both symbolize—has domesticated itself at the center of our cultural consciousness, it's partly because the world is befouling itself at an extraordinary rate. But it's also partly as a kind of bad-faith way of establishing good faith. We talk openly about what has been traditionally unmentionable to show that we are above the genteel conventions. The once unspeakable word is a shorthand way of displaying how genuine we are, how free of the suffocating influences, how *real*. . . .

Ugly thus becomes "beautiful"—at least in the loose sense—because it is true. Keats's outrageous proposition about beauty and truth is fulfilled by being stood on its head.

Not only are truth and beauty stood on their heads but also the relative deportment of the hero and his foes. The new Galahad plainly declares, "My strength is as the strength of ten because my mouth is foul." I have no better reason for introducing *The China Syndrome* into this review. If no-

² Michael Douglas was the producer of the film! For a closer view of the wheels-within-wheels of this meretricious production, consult, in *Commentary*, June '79, "The Harrisburg Syndrome" by Samuel McCracken, as well as Richard Grenier's "Jane Fonda and Other Political Thinkers."

table for Jack Lemmon's performance and for the coincidence of its gimmick with a near-calamity that disturbs our night's repose, it is otherwise a salvationist melodrama that blunders towards its improbable denouement like a Hitchcock vehicle in which the *frisson* derives from a quasi-political ambience whereby two public-service lackeys are momentarily glorified as the scourges of rectitude.

If *The China Syndrome* was not the trashiest film of the year, *Hair* was. Of course, I speak in hyperbole. I didn't see all the films of the year and there is no way to measure a bottomless pit. *Hair* is a reminiscence, I gather, of the Sixties and of the takeoff into celebrations of "ugly" which are still fulsomely with us and threaten to stay for a long day's journey. Of the extent to which Milos Forman's shoddy film departs from the original revue, I have no idea. It must differ to a broad extent, since it contains scenes which couldn't have been conveyed on a stage. However *spontaneous* or *vital* public and critics in America once thought of it as being, however much style it might have boasted when confined to the limits of scenography and choreography, it seemed to me, having known no other version, an over-strenuous, all but hysterical exhibit, sick and plebeian, unfunny and untuneful—its performers knocking themselves out as if they had been flogging the piece into life every evening for fourteen years!

Loaded—I might say burdened—with the familiar anti-establishment sneers and leers, sexual-lib lyrics, anti-Vietnam gags painfully outdated, and puerile dance routines, the film suffers radically from Milos Forman's complete indifference towards the possibility of a unifying style. There is no charm, there is no cinematic rhythm in his handling; it is all like an encounter with a pack of capering ghosts(or goats!) in Central Park, evoking the stench of that horse manure from the tourist carriage-trade which is today the emblematic odor of this democratic no-man's-land of beastly children, dogs and desperate joggers, cruisers, and the smiler with a switch-blade knife. If any comic social conception is involved it can only be that of a utopia in which black, white and socialite mutually copulate in a Fleetwood; the whole tired business confirms my view of Forman as an uncreative dwarf who, having filmed virtually the same movie three times in Czechoslovakia, had no more to say before ever the Tartars had moved into Prague. Now he's a pimp for populism and sentimental anarchy (cf. *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*). Allowing for the probability that he was principally hired to "shoot" a production number, he was the last director who should have been chosen, if producers' intention was to revitalize *Hair* and not simply put it under a dryer.

To see Walter Hill's *The Warriors* directly before or shortly after *Hair* is to see an impressive contrast in the art of transfiguring a sub-cultural idiom. *The Warriors* is everything—essentially—that *Hair* is alleged to have been: a musical, though no one pictured in *The Warriors* sings; a pop manifestation designed as a cycle of kinetic movement with a group ethos that keeps it at one remove: this is theatrical integrity. Hill's antagonists are a lordly, if illiterate, gang of juvenile delinquents, "The Warriors," and the film, shortly summarized, enacts their efforts, during one night, simply to "get home," *safely*, to Coney Island from the Bronx, by way of the subway

system, with every other juvenile gang, as well as the police, alerted to stop them because they are falsely believed to have assassinated the Leader of all the gangs. Manhattan, mostly underground, becomes a microcosm, like the dark forest or the inimical ocean of the Hero-myth. I don't want to bear down too heavily on this aspect and blither about Ulysses and the Argonauts, for I'm not of the mind that believes allegorical readings automatically confer significance. But I do believe it is self-evident that certain passages in narrative art, which would include the Flight-and-Pursuit scheme of the movies, *tend* to remind us of epic models, the more so if they are intensively organized within a strict time span and a homogeneous setting. At root, they mirror the same human effort as the ancient originals which were not, after all, conceived as literature unrelated to tribal experience. But the resemblance must be earned. (Every stagecoach hitching in a John Ford movie is *not* a station of the cross!) *The Warriors* has an underlying classic form; the action moves from sunset to dawn and from underground (mostly) to waves breaking on the shore.

It was clear to me in Walter Hill's first film, *Hard Times*, that he was pursuing something more paradigmatic than the contingency which formed his plot. Already he was constructing a kind of ur-City from dock-side warehouses, furnace rooms, tunnels and back alleys: a clean, ill-lighted place in which outlaws could incontinently flourish. In both these films he has grasped the abstract possibilities in his given story line. What, above all, distinguishes *The Warriors* from *Hair*—since I have chosen to juxtapose them—is Hill's unfailing sense of beauty. From the opening shot of a pink-lighted Ferris wheel revolving in the dusk, followed by a rhythmically cut sequence of the several gangs converging, each dressed uniformly to characterize its sobriquet ("The Saracens," "The Moon Roamers," "The Van Cortlandt Rangers," "The Riffs"), *The Warriors* is a marvel of fluid composition, of—you might even say—choreography. Grills, girders, turnstiles, tracks and ramps form an interlocking labyrinth, more dangerous than drab; even the normally dismal graffiti with which the trains are camouflaged becomes an invention of film decor. Pools of indigo bathe the station exits; signal lights flare into suffusions of blood-red and in one blinding closeup, as Swan and the girl throttle-kiss on a side-track, an express-train barrels through, flashing window-cubes an explosive semaphore of white-heat pulsations. (In this medley of hesitation and violence, racketing sound and amplified color, Barry de Vorzon's musical score is an inseparable feature.) Of no small importance: if we're required to stare fixedly at the lesser breeds without the law for nearly two hours, their principals had better be stareable! Hill was adroit enough to enlist a handsome young actor (Michael Beck) as Swan, the surrogate chief of The Warriors, and for the so-called whore he didn't, thank God, impose on us one of those frizzy-polled monsters with whom we are affronted by the score on the street. Deborah von Falkenburgh is a shapely female with recognizable hair and a warm, insolent voice. (She's a Harvard graduate, in case you had wondered!)

When you work with archetype and a purified naturalism, you may

well risk a distortion of probability at other levels. Intent on the hero who wins against odds, Hill stretches more than a point in his contest of good and evil. The real killer in *The Warriors* seemed to me to savor his mental perversion too consciously and the black leader of The Riffs, with his dark glasses and his faithful mob who see that justice is done ("I—want—them—*wasted*"!), is too glib a duality of mobster and guru. Another antithesis is forced to the surface when Swan and his girl—all blood, sweat and tatters—find themselves face-to-face in a subway car with a far-too-creamy "mod" couple. If only for a moment, Social Confrontation is introduced, which plays no part else in the action. Much of the film's compelling unreality and concrete menace is established by the fact that there is *nobody* in the world of the Warriors save other gangs and the police. (A similar sensation of *no help, no way*, dominated *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, for the same reason.) Finally, when Swan surveys Coney in the cold light of dawn and asks, "Is this what we fought so hard to get back to?", it was as if a piece of sound-track from *The Deer Hunter* had been misplaced. The rest of the ending is good: the hero, immemorially, achieves equilibrium only to shatter it and begin again. Swan wanders off along an ocean front into another life, with a girl he doesn't really want. With all errors of simplicity accounted for, *The Warriors* is a work of excitement and delight. Out of this nettle, danger, Hill plucked his flower of urban violence—beauty. In my opinion, *The Warriors* is the most inventive film of its kind (the kind that employs the hoodlum as anti-hero) since *Bonnie and Clyde*.

Picnic At Hanging Rock is the second and the best of three films made by Peter Weir³ and the masterpiece to date of Australian independent filmmaking. To call it a masterpiece in the context of our current critical and advertising vocabulary is to court skepticism; the term is usually reserved for something weighty and pragmatic, believed to point a moral with social resonance. *Picnic* is frankly a diaphanous horror story, firmly situated in a time and place, shrewdly observed and knowingly acted with the precise shadings of social rank and conformist vigil which we see in the best films from England and France. For those conditioned by the demons of certitude, it is advisable not to speculate as to whether two girls and a school-mistress actually disappeared from the face of Australian earth during a picnic on February 14th, 1900, or if the "true story" was invented by the woman who wrote the novel. Many viewers, I learn, have been dissatisfied by the absence of concluding evidence in the story. They must be the same who cannot read poetry. I would have said that they were waiting for the literal appearance of the Shaggy God, himself, if it were not clear to me that given the clues—St. Valentine's Day and pipes

³ His third and least important film, *The Last Wave*, opened in the U. S. A. His first, *The Cars That Ate Paris* (Paris being a small town in Australia), retitled *The Cars That Ate People*, has not (May '79) been released yet and, according to Weir, has been crucially cut. The film is an original work of gallows humor, with two wonderfully eccentric performances; it was shown at Cannes four years ago. I saw *Picnic* two years ago in Stockholm—which gives you a fair idea of the U. S. A. distribution lag.

in the musical score—they never did close with the real subject of this work: the visitation of Pan.

Beyond the socialist-colonial suburbia that hugs the eastern coast of Australia lies an aromatic hinterland of eucalyptus, koala bears, gekko lizards, macaws, giant mushrooms and aboriginal legend. This is the setting, eighty years ago, in which Mrs. Appleby, headmistress of a boarding-school, wages a losing battle, with reason and decorum, against the occult and sensual forces that gather around a magnetic mountain. "Girls!" she announces, in a burst of generous concession, as her pupils mount the carriage for their picnic, "Once beyond bounds, *you may remove your gloves!*" (Rachel Roberts' delivery, thumb and forefinger joined in a teacup gesture, is priceless). At the rock, time stands still, girls lie like expiring moths on the warm grass, red clouds blur a whitened sun, young loins steam and a fat girl runs screaming from the slopes, eventually to confide, in a tremble, that not only had her three chums been drawn irresistibly into a limbo above but as she fled downward, Miss McGraw, the mathematics teacher, had passed her, going *up*, and without her skirt!

Weir's movie is permeated with suppressed eroticism that never crudely surfaces. By lyric touches and the art of indirection he conveys the somewhat smelly radiance that emanates from the girlish admixture of innocent crush and diffused smut which constitutes the eternal milieu of adolescents segregated from the other sex. The spoken language is refreshingly articulate—indeed, it is *language*—and every color composition exhales a natural or contrived beauty. Lovely girls, lovely analogies: swans, flowers, young trees reflected in darkening waters. I was reminded of Elie Faure's inspired image when describing the phenomenon of Watteau's art under the regime of Louis XIV: "a profound sigh of nature delivered from a corset of iron. . . ."

Having in mind *The Warriors* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, I realize that the older I get in the service of the perishable art, the more I am convinced that if a film is not poetry, it is nothing much.

MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Tropics of Minimalism

REAL MINIMALISM wasn't an idea that dancers played around with for very long. Yvonne Rainer's famous manifesto, printed in *Tulane Drama Review* in 1965, scraped away all the accretions of theatricality, egotism, and sentiment that she felt had been smothering the dance art. "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe," said Rainer, and no to a lot more. Minimal dance as practiced by Rainer, Deborah Hay and others had a dry, boring clarity. You knew nobody was trying to seduce you or con you or mystify you. The point was small but unmistakable.

In dance, minimalism worked as a corrective measure rather than an art form. By the time its principles had been enunciated, everyone who had started out to work with plain, non-narrative, non-manipulative movement was expanding out into wider realms of mysticism, mixed media, complex structures or games. By 1971 Rainer herself began using stories, and two years later she made her last dance-theater-film work, *This is the Story of a Woman Who . . .*, and segued into filmmaking.

For an idea that lasted such a relatively short time in its crystal form, minimalism has had a powerful effect on our dance frame of reference. This spring, almost by accident, I found myself showing two dance films to a San Francisco audience—Twyla Tharp's *Sue's Leg* and a new movie of Rainer performing her 1966 cornerstone piece, *Trio A*. This seven-minute dance is a concise statement of minimalist theory. Wearing a dark T-shirt and sweat pants, Rainer works close to one spot. Her movement consists mostly of folding and unfolding the body in different ways, some fairly intricate but none requiring the specialized apparatus of a trained dancer. Nothing is repeated; the progression is nonstop, there are no transitions or adjustments between the large units of movement, and the dynamics are very even; there's no compositional complexity—only one thing is going on at a time; Rainer's focus and performing attitude are deliberately neutral, aimed straight into the space where she's going. When I realized I would somehow have to relate this plainspoken, radically severe work to Tharp's glamorous Fats Waller dance of 1975, I was a bit worried.

But when I saw the two films together, Rainer looked much less strange to me than she did 15 years ago. The attitudes of minimalism have filtered into some of our most popular theater dance forms, and none shows them more clearly than Tharp. A primary goal of minimalism was to draw attention to the body as a nonvirtuosic movement source—to show that any movement is worth looking at, not just tricks or exaggerated gestures; and a primary characteristic of the Tharpian dancer is his or her familiarity. Tharp attains this look by the use of minimal devices. The clothes are based on streetwear, not dance costume; the dancer's body is

easy, sometimes even slouchy, not pulled up and distorted into dancery grandeur; the focus is inward and the projection modest; the movement flows continuously, not stopping to pose or emphasize, and the dancer is responsive to his or her body weight instead of resisting it. All this makes a Tharp dancer look natural, and Tharp dancing look like anybody could do it. We couldn't, of course, but the ordinariness provides us with a bridge to Tharp's choreographic labyrinths.

Perhaps because people branched out from it so quickly, minimalism in dance has never become codified. It can mean many things, and choreographers who aren't minimal at all, like Tharp, have incorporated aspects of it. Some minimalist concerns that have appeared in post-minimal work include the use of low or no dynamics (Robert Wilson), the use of nontechnical movement such as walking (Lucinda Childs), and the avoidance of predictable or manipulative choreographic forms (improvisational ensembles like Rainer's Grand Union and the second-generation Contact Improvisation groups). In recent months several post-minimalists have shown their work in New York, demonstrating ways that relatively simple movement has become only one element in a much larger complex of ideas, images and philosophies.

Andy deGroat, who made the spinning dances for many of Robert Wilson's theater epics, has been working independently for a couple of years. Using simple steps of walking, running, leaping, turning, and more decorative but sketchily executed arm movements, he's made open-space pieces that are like big ballets without their corsets. The expansiveness of deGroat's movement, the amount of space the dancers cover, the buildups and fadeouts of intensity, all suggest a more formal, conventionalized but not necessarily more meaningful sequence of events than what we're looking at. *Red Notes*, deGroat's new work, was performed by nine dancers at the Lepercq Space of Brooklyn Academy. His movement language hasn't changed much, but this time the piece is not about movement. The movement is a vehicle for something else.

I'm not at all sure what the something else is, but it appears to have something to do with perception. The floor space is marked off with tape in perspective lines converging away from the audience. At intervals, various numbers of dancers walk straight along these lines, getting closer together—and apparently smaller and higher—as they approach the vanishing point, larger and more formidable as they fan out coming towards us.

For the first time deGroat is using bizarre, Wilson-like objects and events. A plexiglass table with a pitcher and water glasses on it is placed far away, just where the perspective lines meet, and separated at first from the audience by a scrim. A man shrouded in what might be a blanket, and a woman carrying a lighted lamp cross slowly behind the scrim. Shoes are thrown from offstage into the performing area, and one dancer gathers them up clumsily in her arms, runs with them. Later the scrim goes up and people pause in their dancing rounds to take drinks of water at the plexiglass table. Through loudspeakers a man reads Gertrude Stein

very didactically and insistently; then a fast, propulsive portion of Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* is played.

These things all are presented with some urgency or drama. More than merely coexisting with the red-clad dancers who are almost always moving through the foreground space, they interact with and sometimes override the dancers. It might be that the whole dance has to do with the figure-ground duality, the idea that any number of things in our attention field could become a subject, depending on how we focus.

David Gordon's imagination seems to be essentially a linguistic one. Like deGroat he's interested in the blurry borderline between performing and being natural. His movement, like deGroat's, is large and non-technical, but more formal, shaped into quasi-calisthenic units that repeat, run into one another, team up, split apart, but always maintain the same configuration. He rules out succession or development or forced dynamics so that he can orchestrate these units in almost infinite ways.

In the first part of *An Audience with the Pope*, the voice of David Vaughan reads a through-the-looking-glass history of papal audience as performance, that in a zany, convoluted way manages to explain, among other things, how the pope's dance became pop dance, and what is the origin of the term "the pope's nose." Larger than lifesize slides of Vaughan in papal vestments are projected on the wall of Gordon's Soho loft. He appears to be gazing down at the space below, where Gordon is performing a nonstop sequence of walks, hitch steps, slides, pivots, and drop-rollover-squats. The sequence seems very long, and the activity has such similarity in tone that I can't remember which set follows which. Gordon is joined by Valda Setterfield, and they go through the sequence in unison, except that Setterfield is musing aloud to herself about the pope as private person and performer—"Maybe there are vestments he could wear for tennis, but skiing . . ."

The whole thing begins again three more times, once as a trio for women in unison, once for two couples, and once for seven dancers. By the time the quartet begins, I still haven't learned the sequence, but it's clear that each couple begins in a different part of it, since they're in counterpoint, and at startling moments they fall into unison, acquire a different partner, and continue the counterpoint, without interruption. In the final septet the structure breaks apart even more, into a seven-part canon with individual variations in timing, direction, number of steps repeated; until, at the end, a short period when the dancers just indicate the movements, doing them almost conversationally, the way Setterfield has been murmuring her soliloquy all along.

Gordon seems to make dances as a form of problem solving. He doesn't appear to regard his works as entities that have their own shape and must always be performed in that shape. He adapts, cuts, splices together material for use in different situations, and his New York concerts often seem to be continuous discourses on single ideas even though they may include excerpted or revised versions of older pieces. This spring's program began with a 1972 piece, *One Part of the Matter*, in which Valda Setterfield, in an old-fashioned wool bathing costume, took a series of poses copied from the body motion studies of photographer Eadweard Muybridge,

while on tape Gordon's voice directed her in a not-necessarily-corresponding series of poses. After *Pope*, the dancers went without a break into a condensed version of last year's *What Happened*, a fragmented word-movement narrative that must have led to Gordon's development of the pope piece. All three works on this program were concerned with information conveyed in small segments that insist you deal with movement, spacing and sounds even while you're struggling to put together a shattered continuity.

Another aspect of minimalism concerns pure structure. Having accepted movement in its most basic locomotor forms, people like Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs and Laura Dean could concentrate on the sequence and floor pattern, and later, on embellishing the movement itself in various minimal ways. Repetition has been a key instrument for these choreographers. Not only is it the simplest way of structuring movement, it provides an analog to contemporary rhythms and processes, externalizing our unconscious response to computers and automation. Grethe Holby and Kathy Duncan, veterans of the spinning, stamping marathons of Laura Dean, are both continuing to work with repetition, and in their spring concerts, especially Holby's, I found an even closer relationship to everyday life. With their sleek, shiny drop-dead dancewear, pink and amber floor lighting, and occasionally earsplitting music (one dance was accompanied by Lou Reed's catastrophic "Metal Machine Music"), Holby's dancers brought punk to loft dancing. Indeed, it's not much of a jump from minimal dance to the semi-hypnotic, pulsing vacuities of disco, or the hyped-up self-destructiveness of punk.

All repetition-minimal dancing has a tendency toward self-punishment. Just setting yourself the task of repeating a step or a sequence of movements for a very long time has the same goal-oriented, endurance-testing competitiveness as our current national pastimes of jogging and calisthenics. Sometimes exhaustion is the point of the dance. Kathy Duncan used to do a piece called *Running Out of Breath*, in which she did just that, sprinting around the space and at the same time explaining to the audience what she was doing and how it felt. Grethe Holby's new works, *Ode* and *String Out*, shown at the Kitchen, seemed constructed so that the dancers would be driven beyond the limits of their strength. As they fought to go on, their movement became distorted in different ways. Some lost their line, sketched in arm gestures, traveled less far, jumped less high. Some seemed to become semi-conscious, losing their focus and occasionally their place in the sequence. Because the movement didn't change, you could see the unplanned stresses the dancers put into it as their stamina gave out.

Holby's movement vocabulary is far from everyday—she uses many of the basic classroom steps of ballet, even though some of her six dancers are not exemplary ballet technicians. She considers it a matter of individualism, not a defect, that some dancers are less skilled or less ideally beautiful than others. What she's done to these steps is first to use only a limited number of them, then to present them at steady tempos, mostly quite fast, in successive units, uninflected and without any pauses or transitions

between them. Holby also avoids dynamic buildups and stressed phrasing. This was particularly apparent in the year-old *Steady State Turning Cycles*, which had a score of pulsing synthesizer chords by Richard Peaslee. Circling with large sliding steps and little leg gestures from ballet, the dancers covered a lot of ground in formations of three and four, but though they kept in time with the music, they held back from the thrusting-subsiding momentum it suggested. And in the Lou Reed piece, *β HookUp*, they threw themselves to the ground, rolled over, sprang up again, as if violence was as commonplace to them as entrechats.

Kathy Duncan strikes me as one of the few dancers who hasn't diverted minimalism or absorbed it into work that has other concerns. If anything, Duncan seems to be cutting out some of the more interesting maximalisms that may have inadvertently crept into her work over the years. Her new dance, *An Hour for Piano and Dancers* (Tom Johnson), was given at American Theater Lab by Duncan and five other women, with Yee-Ping Wu as pianist. Like the music, the dance is an uninterrupted sequence made of a very few basic motifs that keep combining and recombining to create different atmospheres. Duncan's entire preoccupation now seems to be with balance and unbalance as produced within a walking pattern. The dancer throws her body forward or teeters back, then makes a business of recovering without allowing herself to be pulled into any new movement designs or directions. The speed of the original step, the force of the impulse by which she disturbs her balance, and the upward or downward tendency of the step at the moment of deviation all determine how far and how drastically the dancer oscillates before returning to stability. Both the walking and the falling occur in all kinds of spatial groupings and at different speeds.

I think it's Duncan's single-mindedness that impresses me most in this dance. It colors the dance unmistakably with intensity and contrast. The dancers focus in front of themselves, seldom acknowledging each other directly though they often work in close unison. They move in straight lines, keep a contained, unaccented flow of energy going. Those moments when they pitch forward or stagger back seem either highly dramatic or highly arbitrary. After a while you realize that the fall is not going to be really dangerous—the body always catches itself before going very far out of control, sometimes the flailing-up arms or the shoved-forward pelvis don't actually displace the center of gravity. But the walking suggests a constancy, uprightness and control that the falling always contradicts, and there's one section where the impulse escalates into lurching, convulsing violence. The women at various times looked to me like lost little girls, like comrades in some faintly unpleasant, demanding but virtuous enterprise, like neurotics whose survival depended on deliberately destroying order and proving they could get it back.

Reviews

GUY DAVENPORT

The Champollion of Table Manners

TABLE MANNERS, we learn in this ungenerously tedious book,¹ are one of our subtlest lines separating civility from barbarity, an orderly barrier erected against chaos, and a set of gestured signals that began when the first two people to share a brained tapir trusted each other enough to eat together. Ungenerously tedious: the book is laughably mistitled. It is an analysis of several hundred Amazonian and Plains Indian myths, as well as a continuation of the elaborate structuralist theory of culture which began two volumes back with *The Raw and the Cooked* and *From Honey to Ashes*. Table manners are first mentioned on page 307. We do not see the phrase again until page 427. Not until page 471 do we leave the rain forest and prairie to hear an intense, brilliant, and brief discourse on what all that has gone before has to do with table manners. And we might complain that the publishers do not provide their translation with the original jacket, which presumably has images we are to consult, and they omit an illustration on page 462.

Obliquity is the structuralist trademark. There is always something to be explained before something else can be explained. We begin with many versions of a myth about a clinging woman, "The Hunter Mon-manéki and His Wives" from the Tucuna of South America. We don't know it yet, but the essence of the book is all here in this strange and apparently pointless tale. The hero gets a frog pregnant by pointing his penis at her, they marry, go hunting together, and straightway bump into the fact that they dine on wholly different things, and the hunter's mother has a sharp word for a daughter-in-law who serves cockroaches as a delicacy. Our hero marries four more wives, with indifferent success. One of them comes in half at the waist. When he tries to abandon her, the top half clings to his back and appropriates his food. Indian myths tend to be Bosch-like, nightmarish, strange.

Some fifty transmutations and variants of this myth later, we move to North America to hear another set. These also have to do with marrying frogs. Sun and Moon, looking down on the earth one day, decided to choose wives from the creatures below. Moon chose a maiden, but Sun, who did not like the squint on human faces when they looked at him, chose a frog. The mother of Sun and Moon was willing to be charmed by both her daughters-in-law, though Frog Wife came under suspicion immediately, because she peed at every hop. The test, however, was table

¹ THE ORIGIN OF TABLE MANNERS: Introduction to a Science of Mythology: 3, by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Translated from the French by John and Doreen Weightman. Harper & Row. \$30.00.

manners. The wedding feast was a nice mess of buffalo chitterlings. The Indian wife crunched hers with a fine loud smacking noise and was much admired. Poor Frog Wife did not even know which was the food and which the fire beneath. She fished out a piece of charcoal, sucked on it, and let black spit run down her chin. This made everybody sick. Moon was derisive. Frog Wife jumped on his face and stayed there, like the clinging woman in the South American myth.

These tales, told over thousands of years around the campfire, display upon careful inspection and comparison something like a genetic code programmed with all the anxieties and intuition that have fed into it generation after generation. The myth of the clinging woman, for instance, contains a submerged pattern that has to do with the fishing seasons and the constellations that signal their beginning and end. It encodes a creation myth about the stars known as Berenice's Hair. The twist of its plot is a message about marrying too close (incest) and too far off (incompatible *mores*). The ultimate structure that serves as an armature is the Indian feeling for periodicity, measure, a just balance to things.

Once upon a time Sun and Moon were brothers who were always together in the sky. Hence there was no night, no seasons. Things cosmic had to be separated out so that events occurred at regular intervals. Nine months for a pregnancy, menstruation every month, the rainy season immediately following the rising of a constellation: a measured beat to time was, to the Indian imagination, an heroic victory after a struggle among diverse wills.

All of the *Introduction to a Science of Mythology* volumes are orchestrations rather than simple melodies (the analogy to music is Lévi-Strauss's). The largest scheme is a breakthrough into the culture that may be the oldest we are ever likely to know, the sub-Arctic nomads of the Old Stone Age. They ringed the northern hemisphere right around, and descended to populate the Americas. (Lévi-Strauss thinks that the Indians of North America came from the south, or at least that there have been migrations both ways. A myth involving maple syrup in North America parallels one involving honey in South America.)

Then there is a harmony of transmutations. Sometimes they run along a scale such as from raw to cooked, exquisitely graduated along the line (there is a fine cadenza on the boiled and the roasted at the end of this volume). Sometimes they are transmutations of symbols in the grammar of myth (as in Part 6, Chapter 2, where Lévi-Strauss decodes an elaborate and wonderfully confusing association in the Plains Indian imagination of quill-work, pubic hair, stones, scalps, dandruff, sun and moon). Essentially we are faced with hieroglyphs throughout this study, with Lévi-Strauss as our Champollion. The message we are reading is always how culture crosses over from nature. That is, how humanity has civilized itself.

Lévi-Strauss compares himself to a geologist: history is stratified. Freud, he points out, was something like a geologist, working with the layers of individual minds. It is well known by now that Lévi-Strauss is a kind of modern Rousseau and does not like to contrast the primitive and the advanced. Cultures deal with the human condition differently, but these dif-

ferences are not necessarily degrees of superiority or vitality. We have science to turn to in sickness, a Nambikwara or Nuer has herbs and the witch-doctor: and yet what primitive people lose to disease and the marauding tiger we lose to war, traffic, and the killing pace of industrial life.

And why know about the Indian's obsession with the canoe journey of the sun and the moon in the days before time began? Lévi-Strauss keeps seeing a moral. The history of table manners shows that industrial man has subverted their purpose, which was to keep the boorishness of people from contaminating the world. The cookpot and the table are woman's domain; she is close to the world's hard-won cosmic order, as she is a periodic creature. She creates with her body, she is in sympathy with the moon and the seasons. Table manners arise from an intuition that human manners are a contract with the world's order. Ritual acknowledges gods and natural forces.

But all this curious knowledge begins to explain things that our attention might never otherwise have focussed on. In Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night*, for instance, Lord Peter Wimsey finally wins the hand of Harriet Vane. She is the daughter of a country doctor, Lord Peter has got her off a murder charge, but she nevertheless has complex reasons for turning down the dashing, clever aristocrat. She changes her mind and admits her own denied love on a picnic in a punt on the Cherwell. At the same time, Lord Peter is surer than ever of his love. For one thing, Harriet knows how to sit properly in a punt, and recognizes Lord Peter's expertise as a punter. Their rustic meal turns out to be delightful, for they are at ease eating with each other. The picnic basket, of course, is between them in the punt.

This romantic rigmarole would make fine sense to an Amazon Indian. The canoe is a symbol of cosmic harmony (or any other kind: either you know how to paddle a canoe, rower at the front, steersman at the back, the family goods in the middle, or you find yourself among the piranhas and alligators). It is, moreover, a transmutation of the family hearth, for a pot of embers is among the household goods in the middle, and proper canoe manners are emblematic of an harmonious marriage. So the Amazonian would say of Dorothy Sayers' saccharine scene, *Ah yes!* They like the same food, they have the same table manners, his mother will not have a fit when she sees her, and she is a woman who knows how to sit properly in a canoe. Her behavior will not jolt the periodicity of the cosmos.

And there are two moments in literature that I have always found appalling. One is in Scott's *The Antiquary*. The old mendicant factotum Edie Ochiltree (compared several times to Diogenes for his simplicity, wisdom, and ironic tongue) has helped everybody in the novel, some to a family fortune, some to success in courtship, some to self-knowledge. And yet when there is a moment for a round of congratulations over food and drink, we have: "A table was quickly covered in the parlour, where the party sat joyously down to some refreshment. At the request of Oldbuck, Edie Ochiltree was permitted to sit by the sideboard in a great leathern chair, which was placed in some measure behind a screen." *Was permitted to sit! Behind a screen!*

The other outrage is in a note of Malone to Boswell: "Soon after Sav-

age's Life [by Johnson] was published, Mr. Harte dined with Edward Cave, and occasionally praised it. Soon after, meeting him, Cave said, 'You made a man very happy t'other day.'—'How could that be,' says Harte; 'nobody was there but ourselves.' Cave answered, by reminding him that a plate of victuals was sent behind a screen, which was to Johnson, dressed so shabbily, that he did not choose to appear; but on hearing the conversation, he was highly delighted with the encomiums on his book."

Here we have an agreement among people dining that an eater be segregated as unseemly. A code of propriety overrides every other consideration. We read in *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle*: "Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle's hand, holding the tea-cup, was very brown, and very, very wrinkly with the soap-suds; and all through her gown and her cap there were *hair-pins* sticking wrong end out; so that Lucie didn't like to sit too near her." Beatrix Potter's illustration shows them sitting at the extreme ends of a bench, like Indians in a canoe, and a saucer sits between them.

Lord knows what anthropological history there is beneath the screening off of Ochiltree and Johnson; Lévi-Strauss would no doubt talk about it in terms of near and far, and give examples of other ways of being far while actually being near.

A social structure is always something we know without knowing that we know. Lévi-Strauss is at his most entertaining when he shows us that we know systems, for instance, of names. We can distinguish a race-horse's name from that of a cat without any sense of how we know this. We *feel* categorical sets. We can all spot a person without proper table manners without being able to specify his sins. Outside our culture we would be at a loss, ignorant of the *bon ton* of the place. A time-machine invitation to dinner with Elizabeth I would unnerve us. She ate with her fingers, and her chair was lower than ours, to diminish the distance between dish and face.

The fork came to the United States from Bordeaux, by way of the diplomatic corps during the Revolution (to Bordeaux from England, to England from Venice); one would like to know who turned it over American and French fashion. The English use it tines down, and pile food on it with a knife. Montaigne on his journey to Italy and the spas (for the stone) had a keen eye for table manners. Individual goblets were just coming in, replacing the common flagon. It is clear that a history of table manners, especially to the structuralist eye, would be a peculiarly telling evolution of man as a social creature.

Aristotle wrote a *Rules for the Mess Table*; it hasn't come down to us. Ptahotep wrote on table manners (2675 B.C.): "If you are at table with someone of greater standing, take only the food you are offered. Don't watch his plate; keep your eyes on yours. Lower your head when spoken to. Speak only when asked. Laugh when the distinguished person laughs, and in such a manner as to please him." Table manners engaged the attention of Plutarch and Erasmus.

"It remains to be seen," Lévi-Strauss writes at the end of this intricate study of primitive civility, "whether man's victory over his powerlessness, when carried to a state out of all proportion to the objectives with which

he was satisfied during the previous millennia of his history, will not lead back to unreason." That is, have we moved irrevocably beyond the ethics encoded in archaic myths; and if so, where are we? Sartre's "Hell is other people" is "not so much a philosophical proposition as an ethnographical statement about our civilization."

The primitive mind sees disorder in itself and enlists every discipline to keep from contaminating the world. We, says Lévi-Strauss, see all disorder outside ourselves, in the world and in other people; our anxiety is that they will contaminate us: botch our composure, snatch our opportunities, queer our luck.

When myth exhausts its power to transmit messages (how to marry, how to eat, how to be brave), it becomes a narrative that does not know how to resolve itself. Everything, says the contemporary novel, comes to a bad end. (It was in Victorian times that novels began to have ambiguous, unresolved, ironic endings.) Music, too, refuses to be harmonic. We are no wiser than man has ever been about our helplessness in nature. Our fate with love, death, despair, doubt, wealth, courage, everything that's human, is no different after all these years of yearning for a better context. We've got here (to the electric light, the Buick, antibiotics, TV) bringing along practically everything we accumulated along the way. We still eat, with or without manners. We still dream idiotic and awful images. We still draw, sculpt, enrapture ourselves with music, dance, pray, and keep superstitions that would make a Malay laugh. As there is no absolute definition of a human being, it is unanswerable to ask if we have remained human. We have remained Jewish, Catholic, Sicilian, French, Presbyterian. Before that we were savages terrified of thunder, worshipful of fermented grape juice, wondering whether the gods allow us to marry our sister, first or second cousin. We still have no information as to how races branched out from each other, where we first lived, where civilization arose. Our past is forgotten. We can forget it again.

Lévi-Strauss comes from two immediate disciplines, the French sociologists Émile Durkheim and his nephew Marcel Mauss, and the British school of anthropology, Tylor, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, Needham. He is quick to mention his deep debt to American ethnographers and folklorists. He seems to have learned from everybody. His mind is too original to be the exponent of a master or a school. His Marx, Rousseau, and Freud are not anybody else's. He claims to have a Neolithic mind: one that makes a foray, brings down its game, and forgets. His autobiography, *Tristes tropiques* (only last year translated into English in its full text), is a classic in modern French literature because of its presentation of anthropology as an intellectual and personal quest.

He is, to my knowledge, the best and most diligent interpreter of our time. I would like to think that he will be ranked higher than Freud as a reader of riddles and a rediscoverer of the primacy of human behavior in our knowledge of the world. To his distress (or amusement) his discipline has flowed beyond its anthropological and linguistic contours into literary criticism ("another Parisian fad," he remarks) and other endeavors. *Structuralism* has become a rage; structuralist books are kept locked behind glass in the bookstores around the Sorbonne, and French theses know no

limits to structuralist subjects; there is a study of the structure of Freud's punctuation.

Certainly the mode of analysis Lévi-Strauss gives us as a model is bound to enrich both anthropology and other subjects in a vigorous and wonderful way. It is a discipline which he invented, using ideas from Jakobson and Saussure, Rousseau and Frazer; a study of the forces flowing through him would sound like the intellectual history of Europe. And yet he resists being the front of a movement (what movement would it be?), as he has no ideology to promote, no body of knowledge that anyone except anthropologists can master, no theory about humanity to be thinned into a facile vulgarity. He is, I think, most like Montaigne, in that his writing is the essence of restless, intelligent, endless inquiry. He is deliciously French (like Simenon, he is a transplanted Belgian) in his abrupt put downs, his fidgety rages (read him on India and his British disciples), and his passion for the exotic.

He is not an easy writer. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* is one of the most difficult books ever. *The Savage Mind* is, in its charming way, almost as difficult. The four volumes of the *Mythologies* require dedication and stamina to read all 2,500 pages. Yet he has never written an uninteresting sentence. He exemplifies a remark he makes in this book, that in the study of man, there is nothing that we dare consider trivial or incidental.

MARVIN MUDRICK

Love, Careless Love

MEDIEVAL POEMS DO GO ON ABOUT LOVE but no doubt as allegorically as the Song of Songs, in which according to a Reliable Source the beloved's breasts and bellybutton are to be construed as among the fifty-seven most adorable attributes of the Almighty. An exasperated medievalist once confessed that except for *Piers Plowman* there wasn't a single fucking medieval poem which didn't go on about love, but of course beginning with the double pun¹ in the title he had quite overlooked the allegory. Love conquers all, says the brooch worn by Chaucer's Prioress but slyly says so in Latin. Then there are romantic medievalists like D. W. Robertson, Jr. for whom love is God's word, lately obscured by the mists of modernism: in the good old days Christianity was "recognized as a religion of love rather than as a cult of righteousness," he reminds us with more righteousness than love and so proves his point (though the Romantic composer Berlioz had a friendlier view of Mother Church's adaptability: "since she has ceased to inculcate the burning of heretics, her creeds are charming"). During the Middle Ages love, God bless it, was everywhere—e.g. with Paolo and Francesca in hell—and didn't for an instant faze His undivided body of believers, who could stand so much of it because it always stood for something else. God was love but love was damn well whatever God said it was and don't you forget it. When Chaucer's aging Wife of Bath sighs for the lost pleasure of love, we moderns feel our eyes moisten; but in *A Preface to Chaucer* Robertson assembles texts from Psalms 27 and 102, the *Glossa major*, and St. Paul to show that we're wasting our water and that Chaucer, like God, is just having a good laugh at the expense of this untidy creature of his before bundling her off to death and damnation:

St. Paul urges us (Eph. 4. 22ff.) to "put off the old man" and "be renewed" so as to "put on the new man." When the wife, therefore, having invoked "Lord Crist,"² begins to talk about how good it feels to remember the "good things" of youth and then laments that age has bereft her of pith and "flour," leaving only bran, it is clearly and amusingly apparent that she has taken the name of Christ in vain and neglected her opportunity to "flourish again" in a true *renovatio*.

"Alas! alas! that ever love was sin!" cries the Wife of Bath, rattling her chains in hell. Theologians see through a glass darkly, and perched on their shoulders the monkey poet rattles his tin cup and squeals at the passing faithful.

¹ "Piers" is pronounced "Pierce" in Middle English. This is the kind of inside information that distinguishes us scholars from you laymen.

² She doesn't "invoke 'Lord Crist,'" she merely seasons her nostalgia with an oath. Robertson ought to read *The Friar's Tale*, in which even the devil can distinguish between an invocation and an oath.

The trouble is that since the Church stopped burning heretics nobody has had much incentive to follow instructions. Eight centuries ago, in the very heyday of the Age of Faith, Chrétien de Troyes wrote his Arthurian romances, which nowadays to our uninstructed minds seem to be the first European books in praise of love: "we insist on reading it 'as a story,'" says Robertson with patient condescension toward our misreading of *The Knight of the Cart*, "so that we become vicariously involved in the hero's 'adventures' and so lose the exemplary force of the narrative." If only we could understand that what we're supposed to do is discover sermons in stones. For instance, when Lancelot climbs into a cart meant for thieves and traitors because the carter informs him that otherwise he won't find out what has happened to Guinevere, we are moved by this evidence of the power of love; but it's clearly and amusingly apparent to Robertson, St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Bernard that love (i.e. not *love*) is a hotbed of hanky-panky, and that a lover who goes so far as to humiliate himself in the service of love can look forward to V.I.P. treatment in the hotbox next to the Wife of Bath's: what reasonable reader, therefore, would deny that if Chrétien knows what's good for him his exemplary intention here is to ridicule love and "emphasize the extent of the inversion to which a submission of the reason to the [sic] sensuality may lead"? Or nowadays we read Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* under the delusion that only a writer full of tenderness and concern for his characters would write eight thousand verses on the earthly dilemmas of men and women and the joys of love; but Robertson knows better, knows it's (quite like Shakespeare's revolting caricature of it) an exemplum about a libidinous young fool who gets a crush on a loose woman and isn't even man enough to do the job all by himself. In Book II, for instance, Chaucer presents his heroine in a long episode alone, thinking about Pandarus's news that Troilus is in love with her, wondering and worrying, still in a state of anxiety and indecision going to bed and having the dream of the terrific eagle with feathers white as bone, till at last the poet regretfully leaves her with four words that read like a signature of love: "Now let her sleep"; but only a reader susceptible to tone, texture, meaning, and common decency would be moved by Criseyde here and everywhere else, and if Chaucer is following instructions his official intention is to "emphasize the extent of the inversion to which a submission of the reason to the sick [sic] sensuality may lead."

Lancelot, the Wife of Bath, Troilus, Criseyde may think that what they feel is love but God knows better. The philosopher Karl R. Popper has described the differences between a scientific theory and such systems of opinion as sometimes go by the name of theory but seem to their adherents to explain everything, especially how people really feel rather than how they think they feel. Out of a certain delicacy he concentrates on systems propounded by mere mortals, spellbinders like Marx and Freud whose persuasiveness "seemed to have the effect of an intellectual conversion or revelation, opening your eyes to a new truth hidden from those not yet initiated. Once your eyes were thus opened you saw confirming instances everywhere: the world was full of verifications of the theory. Whatever happened always confirmed it. Thus its truth appeared mani-

fest; and unbelievers were clearly people who did not want to see the manifest truth." Popper concludes: "A theory which is not refutable by any conceivable event is non-scientific. Irrefutability is not a virtue of a theory (as people often think) but a vice."³ Medievalists will swell with indignation and retort that (1) science has nothing to do with art; (2) respect for what the writer says has nothing to do with scholarship; (3) religious freedom is one of the pillars of democracy; (4) they themselves have disagreed with Robertson from the very moment he started waving his crucifix around (by "disagreement" they mean: "Professor Robertson perhaps goes too far, but he is an astute and vigorous scholar, and his method provides a salutary occasion for the rest of us to reexamine our own blah blah blah"); and (5) at all events any irrefutable system is better than none. Love, careless love isn't irrefutable enough, anything so private and partial needs tucking and binding to the measure of a system, as when Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante gruesomely drape the private parts of Marie de France's "Guigemar" with yards of systematic gibberish:

His success in war contrasts sharply with his complete indifference to women and love. This rejection of the possibility of a relationship that would offer purely private fulfillment (as opposed to the public rewards of prowess: i.e. honor and fame) and the resultant deepening of self-awareness mark Guigemar as sexually and psychologically immature. In modern terms, he is engaged in the dangerous enterprise of avoiding or repressing the passionate, instinctual side of himself, which is a form of psychic self-mutilation. . . .⁴

One would rather listen to a Robertson or a St. Bernard or even a Doberman Pinscher. Certainly one would rather listen to what comes through of Marie herself in this version by Hanning and Ferrante:

"My lady," he replied, "for God's sake, have mercy!
Don't be annoyed if I speak like this to you.
It's appropriate for an inconstant woman
to make some one plead with her for a long time
to enhance her worth; that way he won't think
she's used to such sport.
But a woman of good character,
sensible as well as virtuous,
if she finds a man to her liking,
oughtn't to treat him too disdainfully.
Rather she should love and enjoy him;
this way, before anyone knows or hears of it,
they'll have done a lot that's to their advantage.
Now, dear lady, let's end this discussion."

³ Karl R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (London, 1963), pp. 34-35, 36.

⁴ THE LAIS OF MARIE DE FRANCE, translated and introduced by Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante. Dutton. \$14.95.

The lady realized he was telling the truth,
 and immediately granted him
 her love; then he kissed her.
 From now on, Guigemar is at ease.
 They lie down together and converse,
 kissing and embracing often.
 I hope they also enjoy whatever else
 others do on such occasions.

True, the "translation" is a styleless and rhythmless crib, and ought to have been printed if at all as an interlinear gloss on Marie's terse and businesslike octosyllabic couplets (" 'Dame,' fet il, 'pur Deu, merci! / Ne vus ennoit si jol vus di! . . . ' "); true, there are infelicities ("It upset him to leave his beloved behind"): but nothing's perfect, not even love, which as Hanning and Ferrante observe "cannot forever remain static, secure, and untested within a womblike private world." What love needs is a womb with a view.

Early in the poem Guigemar suffers a "thigh wound" while hunting, and, though soon enough both he and it have been kissed and made well by the beautiful lady whereupon everybody forgets about it, the issue demands to be scrutinized. Marie couldn't have read *From Ritual to Romance*, which came out in the nick of time for T. S. Eliot, and she was probably unfamiliar with anthropological explanations of motifs in the oral Breton *lais* which in any case don't survive and by which if they existed she may have been influenced; but she had studied anatomy with one of the remote predecessors of Vesalius and knew that the thigh-bone was connected down there to the knee-bone (which was in turn connected to the shin-bone) and up here to the hip-bone, which was in turn . . . (H. and F.: "the thigh wound is a euphemism" by means of which Marie intends to "portray metaphorically a crisis of sexual growth and awareness in Guigemar that we associate today with adolescence").

Marie is a younger contemporary of Chrétien's and finds love as fascinating as he does, but she gets to the point quickly, a storyteller not a novelist, she's never ceremonious or reserved, she doesn't surround love with such a luxuriance of trials, quests, journeys, adventures, mysteries, emblems; she's as brisk and downright as the Wife of Bath will turn out to be two centuries later, as familiar with domestic routine and the physiology of marriage, shares the Wife's contempt for men who have outlived their maleness but not their meanness: so in "Guigemar" she describes the heroine's old husband and the precautions he takes—" (All old folk are jealous; / every one of them hates the thought of being cuckolded, / such is the perversity of age.) / The watch he kept over her was no joke. / . . . An old priest, hoary with age, / kept the gate key; / he'd lost his nether member / or he wouldn't have been trusted. / He said mass for her / and served her her food." The husband attends to all of his wife's spiritual and material appetites except one; and, though the eunuch priest saying mass and serving tea for the sequestered beautiful lady might well be a romantic medievalist's image of heaven, it's pure hell on earth for the lady. Marie is a woman who thinks of herself as speaking for women, she sees

no reason why women shouldn't have a good time and even make the first move ("One summer morning, / the lady was lying beside her young lover; / she kissed his mouth and eyes"), she hasn't a doubt that sexual pleasure is the greatest pleasure in the world and worth all the risks, among which it doesn't occur to her to consider the risk of sin and judgment: the lady "having granted him her love," Guigemar "stayed with her for a year and a half. / Their life was full of pleasure." The husband isn't much of an inconvenience either, because once she escapes his durance vile he drops completely out of the action, which concludes a couple of hundred lines later when Guigemar, having stormed a castle to rescue her from still another captor, "led away his mistress with great rejoicing; / all his pain was now at an end."

Marie isn't alert to her obligations, she doesn't produce manuals of etiquette for proper young maidens or religious allegories for Jesus-freaks or pop-psych fables for motif-mongers; nor is she drawn to the sort of wish-fulfillment fantasy for unexhausted old wives that generates the Wife of Bath's Canterbury tale about the lusty knight and the loathly lady. Marie's special quality, which despite their resemblances sets her quite apart from the Wife, isn't her interest in pleasure, it's her generosity of spirit, her ungrudging and un-Christian charitableness that rejoices in the pleasure of others. When Sir Lanval is conducted by the girl's two beautiful attendants to the pavilion of the most beautiful girl in the world, Marie couldn't be happier for him:

the lily and the young rose
when they appear in the summer
are surpassed by her beauty.
She lay on a beautiful bed—
the bedclothes were worth a castle—
dressed only in her shift.
Her body was well shaped and elegant;
for the heat, she had thrown over herself
a precious cloak of white ermine,
covered with purple alexandrine [a kind of embroidery],
but her whole side was uncovered,
her face, her neck and her bosom;
she was whiter than the hawthorn flower.

In days of old when knights were customarily bold, Lanval is on the contrary "depressed and very worried" because King Arthur has passed him over in the distribution of largesse, and so Marie sends him off into the countryside where all of a sudden she accentuates the positive by giving him just everything—

The knight went forward
and the girl addressed him.
He sat before the bed.
"Lanval," she said, "sweet love,
because of you I have come from my land;

I came to seek you from far away.
 If you are brave and courtly,
 no emperor or count or king
 will ever have known such joy or good;
 for I love you more than anything."
 He looked at her and saw that she was beautiful;
 Love stung him with a spark
 that burned and set fire to his heart.
 He answered her in a suitable way.
 "Lovely one," he said, "if it pleased you,
 if such joy might be mine
 that you would love me,
 there is nothing you might command,
 within my power, that I would not do,
 whether foolish or wise.
 I shall obey your command;
 for you, I shall abandon everyone.
 I want never to leave you.
 That is what I most desire."
 When the girl heard the words
 of the man who could love her so,
 she granted him her love and her body.
 Now Lanval was on the right road!

Right on! exults Marie, applauding her love-struck hero who will do anything whatever (maybe even climb into a cart meant for thieves and traitors) at love's command. Women have never been much into theology, but Marie is so out of it that she doesn't take a minute to think about compatibility or morality or civic responsibility either, and she's so *cheerful!* as if she gets a *charge* out of her young lovers.

It goes without saying, though the fairy princess does say it to make sure Lanval is aware of whom he's dealing with, that he had better keep his luck to himself: "you would lose me for good / if this love were known"; but otherwise he's in clover: "there is no place you can think of / where a man might have his mistress / without reproach or shame, / that I shall not be there with you / to satisfy all your desires. / No man but you will see me / or hear my words." Understandably, riding back to the city, Lanval is stunned and incredulous, he doesn't "expect ever to see her again." Equally understandably, some time later, having his mistress as often and ecstatically as promised, Lanval is in no condition for society or other women: on an excursion with a company of knights and ladies and the Queen, he stands aside as usual in a daze of love "far from the others; he was impatient / to hold his love, / to kiss and embrace and touch her"; thus, when the Queen propositions him, he rejects her so scornfully that in their ensuing exchange—why would a man not only seem quite uninterested in women but reject the Queen herself?—she insults him into giving away the secret: "'Lanval,' she said, 'I am sure / you don't care for such pleasure; / people have often told me / that you have no interest in women. / You have fine-looking boys / with whom you enjoy yourself'";

When Lanval heard her, he was quite disturbed. . . .
He said something out of spite
that he would later regret.
“Lady,” he said, “of that activity
I know nothing,
but I love and I am loved
by one who should have the prize
over all the women I know. . . .
Any one of those who serve her,
the poorest girl of all,
is better than you, my lady queen,
in body, face, and beauty,
in breeding and in goodness.”

It's not as if life still doesn't have its bad patches; and Lanval soon finds himself up before the furious King, who has been told by Guinevere that she had to fight off Lanval's advances and that he thereupon compounded the outrage by declaring her inferior not only to his mistress but to the lowliest of his mistress's chambermaids. By his boasting, then, Lanval has advertised and lost his mistress, who is also the only possible body of evidence that can save him at the trial. Don't despair, though, because on the appointed day, two at a time in dazzling and stately procession, amazing and delighting the knights and the townspeople, appear her beautiful and seductively dressed attendants till at last with what amounts to a fanfare of all the trumpets of fairyland appears the paragon herself:

They were about to give their judgment
when through the city came riding
a girl on horseback:
there was none more beautiful in the world.
She rode a white palfrey,
who carried her handsomely and smoothly. . . .
She was dressed in this fashion:
in a white linen shift
that revealed both her sides
since the lacing was along the side.
Her body was elegant, her hips slim,
her neck whiter than snow on a branch,
her eyes bright, her face white,
a beautiful mouth, a well-set nose,
dark eyebrows and an elegant forehead,
her hair curly and rather blond;
golden wire does not shine
like her hair in the light.
Her cloak, which she had wrapped around her,
was dark purple.
On her wrist she held a sparrow hawk,
a greyhound followed her.

In the town, no one, small or big,
 old man or child,
 failed to come look.
 As they watched her pass,
 there was no joking about her beauty.

"The judges who saw her / marveled at the sight; / no one who looked at her / was not warmed with joy." Lanval, true knight, rises to the occasion: " 'By my faith,' he said, 'that is my love. / Now I don't care if I am killed, / if only she forgives me. / For I am restored, now that I see her.' " It's almost incidental that her presence ("she let her cloak fall / so they could see her better") and her testimony cause the judges to acquit him; what matters is that afterward and forever

When the girl came through the gate
 Lanval leapt, in one bound,
 onto the palfrey, behind her.
 With her he went to Avalun,
 so the Bretons tell us,
 to a very beautiful island;
 there the youth was carried off.
 No man heard of him again,
 and I have no more to tell.

(H&F: "The superficiality, perhaps even falseness, of the court's values, which was apparent in the mistreatment of Lanval in the beginning, is revealed particularly in the accusation and trial of the hero.")

"Lanval" is Marie's sunniest celebration of love; but idylls are rare, love isn't necessarily reciprocated or desire always gratified, circumstances are sometimes intractable, women aren't always worthy of the love they inspire. In "Chaitivel" ("The Unfortunate One"), a lady who has "the very best manners" trifles with four men's affections on the pretext of not being able to choose among them: eventually, to impress her while she looks on, they all compete so ferociously in a tournament that three are killed and the fourth castrated ("the tip of the lance shot through his thigh / into his body"—this time a thigh wound too real for such an artificial lady to kiss and make well); she grieves with due decorum and consoles the survivor ("I shall compose a *lai* about the four of you / and call it *The Four Sorrows!*"), who however proposes that a more accurate title would be *The Unfortunate One* because he alone remains to see his love "coming and going . . . morning and evening . . . / but I can have no joy from her, / from kisses or embraces, / nor anything good but talk"; " 'By my faith,' she said, 'I like that. / Let's call it *The Unfortunate One.*' " Marie's most touching piece ("Chevrefoil") is a little anecdote about "Tristan and the queen / and their love that was so true, / that brought them much suffering / and caused them to die the same day": Tristan from his exile steals back to Cornwall for a precious meeting—

She went a short distance from the road;
 and in the woods she found him
 whom she loved more than any living thing.
 They took great joy in each other.
 He spoke to her as much as he desired,
 she told him whatever she liked.
 Then she assured him
 that he would be reconciled with the king—
 for it weighed on him
 that he had sent Tristan away;
 he'd done it because of the accusation.
 Then she departed, she left her love,
 but when it came to the separation,
 they began to weep.

And "Laüstic" ("The Nightingale") is another tribute to the power of hopeless love, which here having not so much as a fading memory of gratified desire, settles for tokens: listening to the nightingale has been the lady's excuse for spending the night at her window sharing "across a high wall of dark stone" words and looks with her lover—"she often rose from . . . [her husband's] side / and [Marie's heroines are practical as well as brave and passionate] wrapped herself in a cloak"—but her husband traps the nightingale: "She asked her lord for the bird / but he killed it out of spite, / he broke its neck in his hands— / too vicious an act— / and threw the body on the lady; / her shift was stained with blood, / a little, on her breast. / Then he left the room"; so she "took the little body; / she wept hard and cursed / those who betrayed the nightingale, / who made the traps and snares, / for they took great joy from her. / 'Alas,' she said, 'now I must suffer' "; and sends it wrapped in samite to her lover, who

. . . had a small vessel fashioned
 with no iron or steel in it;
 it was all pure gold and good stones,
 very precious and very dear;
 the cover was very carefully attached.
 He placed the nightingale inside
 and then he had the casket sealed—
 he carried it with him always.

Except for the coy and heartless bluestocking of "Chaitivel," Marie's heroines have no girlish tricks, they are strong and guileless girls who, if love strikes them, offer themselves as explicitly as Lanval's fairy princess to the men they love. Even sight unseen: in "Milun" a baron's daughter, "a beautiful and most refined girl . . . / [who] had heard of Milun / . . . began to love him. / She sent a messenger to him, / to say that, if it pleased him, she would love him" (the good old days! before the saints came marching in). It pleases him so well that "Outside her room, in a

grove / where she went to amuse herself, / she and Milun, very often, / had a rendezvous. / Milun came there so often and loved her so much / that the girl became pregnant." (Marie places "Milun" in South Wales, and the lovers' messages are carried back and forth by Milun's pet swan—whereon H&F's comment: "It has been argued that the lovers' use of a swan is a realistic touch since swans breed in certain parts of South Wales.") "Yonec" is like "Guigemar" in presenting a beautiful young wife imprisoned in a tower by her jealous old husband, and like a mirror-image of "Lanval" in providing the heroine, who prays for the blessing of love, with an otherworldly companion, a hawk-turned-man who (once he proves to her, by taking communion, that he's a Christian!) becomes her lover promptly and, when she "gently begged him / to come back often," promises that "whenever you please, I will be here within the hour." In "Eliduc" the king's daughter falls in love with the knight who has been called from his own land to lead her father's army:

All night she was awake,
 she couldn't rest or sleep.
 The next day, in the morning, she got up
 and went to a window;
 she summoned her chamberlain,
 and revealed her condition to him.
 "By my faith," she said, "this is terrible.
 I have gotten myself into a sorry mess.
 I love the new soldier,
 Eliduc, the good knight.
 Last night I had no rest,
 I couldn't close my eyes to sleep.
 If he wants to give me his love
 and promise his person to me,
 I shall do whatever he likes. . . .

Still, the world takes its toll even of young lovers. Pregnancy isn't a joke for Marie any more than it turns out to be for the baron's daughter and her lover, who must give up their child for many years before the belated reunion and happy ending for all three. In "Yonec" the lovers are found out and the hawk-man impaled on spikes and killed, and it isn't till many years later that their knightly son avenges his father's death by killing his mother's husband: "'Fair son,' she said, 'you hear / how God has led us to this spot. . . .'" / Then she fainted over the tomb / and, in her faint, she died. / She never spoke again. / When her son saw that she had died, / he cut off his stepfather's head. / Thus with his father's sword / he avenged his mother's sorrow." Eliduc is a lover twice over and in sore straits, at the same time devoted to his very model of a loving wife and desperately in love with the king's daughter—

a storm broke out at sea . . .
 it broke and split their mast
 and tore their sail. . . .

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NEW DIRECTIONS

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Then one of the sailors, loudly,
cried: "What are we doing?
Sire, you have inside with you
the one who is causing our deaths.
We'll never reach land.
You already have a faithful wife
but you're bringing another back
in defiance of God and the law
of right and of faith.
Let us throw her into the sea,
so we can get home safely."

Eliduc hasn't yet told either of his ladies about the other, and "almost went mad with anger. / 'Son of a bitch,' he said, 'rotten, / filthy traitor, be silent! / If you had let my love go / I'd have made you pay for it.' / But he held her in his arms / and comforted her as well as he could / from the distress she felt from the sea / and from what she'd heard / of her lover having a wife / other than herself in his country." Marie's resolution of his problem after many vicissitudes makes such splendid use of the institutions of the Church Triumphant that even Robertson might approve, or on the other hand he might say sourly that Marie can't resist allowing her lovers to have things their own sweet way. All right, so some of them do indeed behave badly and have to be punished: as in "Equitan," in which the king and the seneschal's wife suffer the horrible death they planned for the seneschal; or in "Bisclavret" ("The Werewolf"), in which the werewolf settles accounts with his treacherous wife by biting off her nose ("a gesture of justifiable revenge rather than of uncontrolled savagery," according to H&F, this particular werewolf being a modest creature who won't even "don his clothes in public" because "the cultivation of shame—the unwillingness to fall below a certain level of behavior in the presence of one's peers—is a mark of human social awareness, of sensitivity to others": such language! it's enough to make any self-respecting werewolf drop his pants in public and lope on back into the forest).

But murderers and werewolves are exceptions, and generally lovers—God bless them—deserve so much better than the rest of us that for the best of them Marie reserves eternal youth and beauty and unimpaired thighs and noses and love, love, love on the world-lost isle of Avalun.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE

Poetry Chronicle

IN OUR TIME, very good poetry is being written by literally scores of poets I could name, and probably by scores of others whom I either have not read or can not appreciate. And one of the most exciting things about this age of poetry is the diversity of kinds, of poets and poems alike. No one form or anti-form can claim it all and set up as *the* Modern Poetry. There are poets who group together, feel affinities, join movements, belong to schools; who subscribe to causes, take up issues, have missions. There are loners practising the private arts of their own isolated worlds. There are poets of the open and the closed poem, preoccupied with discipline or freedom, intellectual or anti-intellectual. Poetry now can damn rhetoric or accept and exploit it. I just mean to set all this down for what I take to be fact, not to classify, which may lead to the death of criticism. For the good poet is likely to merge and combine these aspects, which are some of the aspects of what is now being composed, day by day.

One chronicle is limited, good people get left out. Here is a handful of varied poets, several of them new.

To begin with seniority: F. T. Prince belongs to the generation of Auden, MacNeice, Spender, and Day Lewis. One does not associate him with any group which began as anti-establishment and became a new establishment, and it is not unfair to say, and it is not news to anyone, that he is less well known than his illustrious contemporaries. Now he has collected his poetry.¹ I find it difficult to report on almost a lifetime's work by a poet hitherto practically unknown to me. But so much is clear: He is all his own man, he is like no one else, he is a major poet. There are perhaps more marvelous felicities in his earlier than his later work. Take these few lines from "Words from Edmund Burke":

great London like a fuscous rose, her door-ways
Warm with the flux of quality, her shops bundles of muslin
sown with rubies,
Her frigates tilted above the mud at low tide, and the town
Like a heap of fresh wet stars.

Or the first stanza of "For Thieves and Beggars":

On the plain is a tower
For robbers, with a grey wall where
A tattered sentry leans upon his pike,
And but the pious viper dwells: but you
Who are gone we also who

¹ COLLECTED POEMS, by F. T. Prince. Sheep Meadow Press. \$4.95.

She and I here wander, we
 Not refuse to remember, and all of you,
 And the wall melts,
 The boughs toss, the rocks
 Nod overhead at nightfall while
 We see all things as they might be.

Or take the first stanza of "Cefalu":

These softs and solids, this clear, that rough,
 Join, not long after dawn, in willing peace.
 The blue hollow not stirred by the seed of a breeze;
 A fallen marble block, the cape: the sea
 Not stained by a gust or submerged shower holds glassed
 On its woman's face no warning of a cloud.

"Soldiers Bathing" is a magnificent poem, and so is the narrative, "Straford," where Prince treads on Browning's territory so differently. By contrast, the long "Memoirs in Oxford," all in rhymed stanzas, reads too regular and even-paced. But the last two poems develop a new, free, personal style in dealing with part of the lives of writers, Laurence Sterne and Rupert Brooke. Rupert Brooke so what? So Rupert Brooke is the essence of an age and an attitude and a way of life. And Prince has got him.

Derek Walcott's first poem in his new collection² is called "The Schooner *Flight*," and it tells of a sailor leaving his home for a voyage (probably his last, but I am gullible) through storm and calm toward the far outer goal. The sailor tells the story, in dialect. He is also a poet. He introduces himself:

I taking a sea bath, I gone down the road.
 I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,
 a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes
 that they nickname Shabine, the patois for
 any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw
 when these slums of empire was paradise.
 I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
 I had a sound colonial education,
 I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
 and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.

And toward the end this story-teller tells us:

Though my *Flight* never pass the incoming tide
 of this inland sea beyond the loud reefs
 of the final Bahamas, I am satisfied
 if my hand gave voice to one people's grief.
 Open the map. More islands there, man,

² THE STAR-APPLE KINGDOM, by Derek Walcott. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$10.00.

than peas on a tin plate, all different size,
one thousand in the Bahamas alone,
from mountains to low scrub with coral keys,
and from this bowsprit, I bless every town,
the blue smell of smoke in hills behind them,
and the one small road winding down them like twine
to the roofs below.

And there, while I should like to be able to quote at far more length, seems to me to be the summed material that makes Walcott the poet he is, though I have to write out of a terrible ignorance. West Indian, partly black, with a heritage of slave ships and exploitation, white colonial elegance and domination; education, sophistication, poetry; compassion despite angers; always, again and again, the sea, the Caribbean. He writes mostly not in dialect, always with drastic originality: "In the Virgins": "You cannot hear, beyond the quiet harbor, / the breakers cannonading on the bruised / horizon, or the charter engines gunning for / Buck Island"; "Sabbaths, W. I. ": "those hillsides like broken pots"; "The Star-Apple Kingdom": "who bore baskets on their heads / down the haemophilic red hills of Haiti." He does not, of course, have to stay in the Caribbean. He has a strong elegy for Robert Lowell. He has a new tableau of Antony and Cleopatra. But of them all, "The Schooner *Flight*" is the one that comes back to me most.

John Hollander³ does not become easier as he goes, nor does the somewhat frustrated pleasure of reading him grow less. He is always on the point of being fully comprehensible and never quite arrives at that point. The poems are poems with beginnings middles and ends; not parts of a continuum you could hack into pieces, without its mattering where you hacked, here would do as well as there, and call the pieces poems. Hollander's poems have not only structure but subject and substance, but even if I know what he is talking about, please do not ask me to tell you exactly what he is saying about it. Then what makes them admirable? It is easy to take examples of his artful combinations: from "Anonymous Master, 'Standing Figure' ": "Of course, the painting, full of the rich / Light of contrivance, could hardly have / That for a name"; "The literalness of shaping a / Mass is like a kind of / Groping around in a / Midnight of thick fact"; "That would mean / Marble clanging out in sweet pain." But this is to break up the sequences, and there are sequences, if not exactly of thought, of a dreamlike train of ideas which in an assured order keep turning into something else. Look again, anywhere. Look at the last lines of "Lachesis":

Is this not all our late work? O, what book
Of random digits does she use? What way
Of casting lots, what chance does she choose? As
If in answer, the sharp winds of whether
It matters or not alternately rise
And fall in no necessary order.

³ BLUE WINE. by John Hollander. Johns Hopkins University. \$8.95.

That is relatively clear. Put it briefly, Hollander is a master poet with an eye for image, a sense of line (and a sense of humor), and a rightness of composition; all of which qualities makes him a delight to read, whether or not we come out more fully informed than when we went in.

Geoffrey Holloway⁴ has made a selection, not really extensive, from two previous volumes and a lifetime of poems. The writing is stark, austere, non-adjectival. The earlier parts of the volume are full of nature. He has the Englishman's sharp eye for bird and beast and flower. Here are snails and slugs, fox and stoat, a handful of "Shore Pickings." Or horses, as in "Enigma":

The new moon—
a stopped boomerang—
the gate,
and the skyline mare—
back dipped
like the sheepwall
she stands by
(only smoother) . . .

In the sunset's
casual apricot
why does she turn
and look at me—
who am not
beautiful?

"Ewe" is the possible variants of her lifetime from lambhood to death, whether as lamb or mutton, as breeder, as source of wool, as a casualty of outdoors. There is a group of memories from World War II in which Holloway served in a parachute field ambulance, and with these are meditations on the Christ, his nature and meanings. There are vignettes of various sorts, as for instance, "Village Church: Capo di Sorrento":

An altar bursting with cherub-heads,
and from the Babe crooked in the Virgin's arm
a yoyo string whose limit finds
—stopped heartbeat of music—a bell.
Baroque. Its inspired bathos
—promiscuous, appalling, healing—
no more refusable than a high-chaired
jam-sticky infant waving a spoon at you,
to come and get it.

In "Surveillance," a zany old lady who insists on living alone in a "matchwood nonsense of a house" has all her neighbors in a state of "fearful helpless responsibility." There are half a dozen poems about the

⁴ ALL I CAN SAY, by *Geoffrey Holloway*. Anvil Press. £2.50.

last illness and loss of a beloved wife, but no more here than in the beast studies is there any occasion for sentimentality. On the contrary, "Odalisque Extraordinary" is a brutal inversion of the theme of the recumbent beauty cosseted and caressed. Holloway can be murky at times, but he can be awfully clear and final. A fine mind, and a sharp presence.

It seems to have been Richard Howard who first in our time revived, with striking success, the dramatic monologue after the example of Browning. Now here is Pamela White Hadas with her own (first volume) quite different brilliant collection of first-person poems.³ All the speakers are female. They may be historical, mythical, or imaginary persons, and they include Arachne, Pandora and Io, Coco Chanel, Lizzie Borden, Jeanne des Anges and Jezebel, The American Girl, and a battered too-fat actress playing and identifying with Ophelia; and many more. Poems in series give, really, brief autobiographies of Simone Weil and Isadora Duncan, with research behind the sketches. Elsewhere, there is the single sonnet, yes, sonnet (as in Yeats, Auden, Pound, Cummings, Jeffers, Lowell), but not exclusively, sometimes in series, free-wheeling and loosely rhymed, often typographically scattered across the page in a way to suggest fragmentation:

Still I am a spectacle:

moo-moon
roaming the milky way, playing solitaire—
udder nonsense—
learning the lexicon

of exile.

I plod and ponder, chew my cud
through dumb and dim star pastures—
plowed—by god.

"Io Moon Cow" of course. Characteristic here is the kind of pun and wordplay the wonderful English language so lends itself to. The ear is sure: "slices with such care to bare / bone past mauve muscles" (Mona Lisa describes Leonardo dissecting). Sometimes Pamela Hadas may be too obviously smart, as in making the same Lisa say (twice), "I have to smile." But she deserves a full quote (hard to select, there is such wealth here) to show what she can do (from "Pandora"):

And you know—there's something to be said for me.
I am the original package deal—the bonus
onus and bane of boredom. I am your free
lunch, your crackerjack toy, your vitamins plus

irony. My first name's Pandora Mud,
but call me what you will as long as All-
Giving is implied: Soup Kitchen, Crude

³ DESIGNING WOMEN, by *Pamela White Hadas*. Knopf. \$8.95.

Oil, Little Miss Sunshine, Moonshine, Plurabelle . . .

I follow stolen fire, War & Glory, Progress.
I'm Ultra, Super, Natural; Bag & Baggage
I am the very basis of the Gross
Universal Product, a hopeful outrage.

So whatever you beg-borrow-steal I'll be
with it—please let me oblige you—C. O. D.

Contemplate next a whole poem, "Profiles Perdus," from another first volume, by Timothy Steele:⁶

It does not matter if in Rome that fall
You, leaning on the rail of the balcony,
Watched a young woman pace the yard below,
Her parasol
Now raised, now shouldered. Nor need you feel, see,

More in the sudden rain which, in Marseilles,
Forced you into that church than the stained glass,
Or the four white candles, or the vast stillness,
Or the way
The marble echoes rippled through the Mass.

Nostalgia is your last, your perfect, fate.
In the vague wash of circumstance, you know
That any instant can in you assume
All the weight
And feeling of the absolute. And so,

What matters, simply, is that you contain
Both past and future, that sometime, somewhere,
You will yourself become the moment—an
Indefinite rain,
A profile disappearing in the air.

Here are very fine qualities of eye and ear, hand and mind, making a formal poem, decorous and decorative, desperately and delightfully unfashionable. There are a number of pieces here that are equally good or even better; some moving and touching, like "Incident on a Picnic"; what seeing a little girl feeding a calf a handful of grass can do to a quarreling couple; or the child's memory in "Learning to Skate." The only danger in Steele's controlled iambs is that they may lock into too regular a metre, and I think this happens to his epigrams, somewhat after the manner of J. V. Cunningham. But two poems, interestingly enough the only two

⁶ UNCERTAINTIES AND REST, by *Timothy Steele*, Louisiana State University. \$9.95.

which dispense with the conventional capital at the beginning of the line, have a different kind of motion: from "Stargazing at Barton":

The alder

in the yard rattles in the wind
and, from the woods, the rumble and
rush of a brook.

Or, beginning "This Is":

This is a child's forest: moss
and stunted pine, the casual
arbutus. In the pre-dawn dark,
lichen glows on the tree trunks,

and then, among the trees, smoky
light, the ironwork of our breath
on the cold air.

There is power here. It takes a thorough grounding in the very iambs which are being recast to produce lines like that. I'm afraid I have said this before.

John Witte's book,⁷ also a first, begins with "Chasing Hamlet." Hamlet rooted his way out of his home yard and got loose in the city, and

We found the women hurling their groceries
over their heads, on Main Street, Hamlet
squirting out from under parked cars,
his tail curled tightly behind.
Children shrieked happily.
Policemen toddled on their knees, pleading,
plunking their nightsticks.
A storewindow had broken, blanketing
the sidewalk. A firetruck came
and backed over a streetsign.

All quite hilarious and jolly slapstick, but it does appear at the end that the pet piglet is gone forever; and any hilarity I may have expected is mostly gone from the rest of the poems, which I find particularly hard to describe. Sometimes real catastrophe or misfortune generates dream sequences, as in "Power Failure": "Lovers rise and paddle / through the air over Pennsylvania. / The farmer drifts over his fields, in moonlight / admiring the pattern: alfalfa, drainage, sweet corn." Often, country scenes or still-lives are inset and combined with bits of love-episodes, very physical in the contemporary manner. There are meditations on given subjects, unsentimental and unsystematic and with a charm all their own.

⁷ LOVING THE DAYS, by John Witte. Wesleyan University. \$3.45.

The lines are informal, as most verse written today is, but they are good enough to make me forget for the time about versification; and along with the collages there are whole poems too, like "Catfish Reunion":

With three or four lines out,
fishing for food,
the big black men hunched in the reeds.
We fished for adventure,
getting dirty after gradeschool.

They said *We come from blue Newark*
where the river's all
factory acid.

Today
when I think of catfish
I'll forget where I am
and slip out over the long cloudy bottoms
to follow them.
All the silent fishermen are there.
Together we thread past
jangling hooks and lures.

Soon we'll be choked back
to the headwaters
where there's nothing left
but to climb up into the rain.

Strong endings are a strong point in Witte.

In yet one more first book, not always, but most of the time, Marilyn Wanick⁸ is just telling us about herself, her family, friends, marriage, heart soul and body, as one assured that we, her readers, will find it all absorbing. And of course she is quite right. "Sick Together" tells how a couple both suffering from wretched colds were closer together than when they are healthy. She imagines driving across the country with her brother and sister, or remembers first going to school with white children. She can go outside herself and her own circle of familiarity, or combine her objects with her own experience. There are two fish poems, of which the first, "The Fish Weeps," ends: "She wants you to be reading / the poem I am writing about her / but she wants to write it. / She weeps every night / wanting to be me." Mostly she versifies thus, dropping her lines on the page a few words at a time, but in "Churchgoing" she not only manipulates rhymed iambs but strips into them lines and sense from the spirituals. But let me quote in full, because it can not be excerpted, "Grass Turned Out Green:"

⁸ FOR THE BODY, by Marilyn Nelson Wanick. Louisiana State University. \$3.95.

On the morning of the seventh day
 God didn't plan to rest.
 God was disgusted.
 God looked around
 and God said
 What's going on?
 Things I'd planned to fly
 walk, things I'd planned to swim
 crawl around in the grass.
 Grass turned out green,
 water wet, everything's
 all mixed up.

And God sat down
 on a big rock
 to think about
 the long task of correction.
 Then God saw
 a shimmer on the water,
 sky curdling into clouds
 and all the innocent ugliness
 of the world.
 And God said,
 Maybe that's good enough.
 I'll let it be.
 And God lay down and rested.
 This was the seventh day.

This is our seventh year together.
 Our plans are mouse tracks in a field of snow.
 Shadows circle like owls around us and the fox is near.
 We lie in the grass,
 embrace each other's weakness,
 have one thing God forgot:
 someone to rest with
 and to blame.

In this, his second volume, Robert Hass⁹ shows high qualities of wit and intelligence, together with an easy skill in versification. Consider the opening of the first poem, "Heroic Simile":

When the swordsman fell in Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*
 in the gray rain,
 in Cinemascope and the Tokugawa dynasty,
 he fell straight as a pine, he fell

⁹ PRAISE, by Robert Hass. Ecco. \$7.95.

as Ajax fell in Homer
 in chanted dactyls and the tree was so huge
 the woodsman returned for two days
 to that lucky place before he was done with the sawing
 and on the third day he brought his uncle.

It shouldn't be Ajax, more like Hector, but this pedantic aside should not obscure the fact that Hass has seen what the simile's nature is. It has at least the illusion of a life of its own. For they went on sawing an enormous quantity of wood, but

They have stopped working
 because they are tired and because
 I have imagined no pack animal
 or primitive wagon. They are too canny
 to call in neighbors and come home
 with a few logs after three days' work.
 They are waiting for me to do something
 or for the overseer of the Great Lord
 to come and arrest them.

Here is that rare commodity in poetry, an original idea. The hero is like a hero who is like an oak or both are like an oak or either is; and the oak brings in a woodsman or woodsmen who have their own story, which is however not finished unless an author (who is godlike but like a god who can fail or give out) has chosen or contrived to bring about an ending. So this poem ends: "There are limits to imagination." The incompleteness is finished. What does not happen may not be as much as a clue to Hass's sometimes incomprehensible progressions, but it is part of it, as in "Old Dominion" (the "he" is Randall Jarrell):

It puzzled me that in his art, like Chekov's,
 everyone was lost, that the main chance was never seized
 because it is only there as a thing to be dreamed of
 or because someone somewhere had set the old words
 to the old tune; we live by habit and it doesn't hurt.

In "The Feast" a hostess sets out refreshments, particularized in pretty detail, and imagines her guests, "and how they all came / as in a dance when she called them. She carved meat / and then she was crying. Then she was in darkness / crying. She didn't know what she wanted." And the frustrations are like what dreams are like and this is dream poetry. Though I am glad there are other kinds as well, it pleases.

With the latest volume by Jon Swan¹⁰ I find myself sometimes at a loss. I am by now quite used to admiring poems (Hollander, Hass) which I do not understand; where I could not, that is, write out in a paraphrase what is being said, or at least what is being seen, heard, imagined or felt. But in

¹⁰ A DOOR TO THE FOREST, by Jon Swan. Random House. \$4.95.

some of Swan's poems, like the long and ambitious "Metamorphosis" (the word means what is an essence of lyric poetry), I can not even dream along. Or take the beginning of "Still Life":

Few homes are meant to be lived in long
 But there still
 at the head of the table
 my father the fog unfolds his napkin
 My mother the wren
 unties her apron.

Cute, but fog, wren. No fit. Tell me where is fancy bred / Or in the heart or in the head? In something I haven't got. But I do not deny that Swan has great merits, that where he is good he is very good, and sometimes lucid. "Logical Progression" is just that, from the deafness of power to where it is no longer deaf. "A Tale for the Longhouse" brings sharply into focus Indians, Indians still though they are working on a high rise. "They rivet and buck their way up, thrive / at a height angels view with concern / and wouldn't tread if you paid them." I like much in the longish poem, "The Mistress' Farewell" (but *mistress*? The term denotes a relationship that practically no longer exists, at least among "us"). There are many nature poems, and some are striking. Here, for instance, is the first of three stanzas of "People and Bats." They

don't mix. These light mice
 that have learned to fly
 at the price
 of being blinded for life wake
 an old fear. The quick
 duck of the head, hands covering hair,
 is instinctive. Even by broad day, the sight
 of clawed wings stuck
 upside down on a wall
 can make our thin skin crawl.

William Mills,¹¹ though neither simple nor easy, is direct and immediate, as well as being personal and cross. He writes about being forty and thinks that's old. He seems to have moved about mostly in the South and Southwest, and mostly alone, though once married, often in love, seldom satisfied. What he constantly expresses is the uniqueness of his own experience, as in "Starlight in Arkansas":

Starlight in Arkansas
 Some would say
 Is no different from starlight
 Anywhere.

¹¹ STAINED GLASS, by *William Mills*. Louisiana State University. \$9.95.

They wouldn't even
If they came to Arkansas.

In the morning
I started bitching about
All the cleanup,
The roof tin bent,
The fences crushed,
The cows gone.

Finally, I will notice two large collections translated from the Russian. The poets are Yevtushenko and Voznesensky¹²; both nationally and internationally well known. Trying to judge Russian poetry without knowing Russian (Voznesensky's volume has facing original, Yevtushenko's not) reduces itself mostly to a study of subject, content, mood, sympathies, personality, and ability to sketch or suggest a character, to tell a story: everything except the poetry itself. Yevtushenko is a poet with a wide range of vision and comprehension, a generous poet with a heart and soul. Soul, that's it, but he is not soulful. Sometimes, in truth, the whimsy becomes too whimsical for me, as in these few lines from "Malachite Frog":

Don't treat the benevolent dusk
harshly.
Don't be afraid of it
when it drops in at the flat,
And give it some yoghurt to eat when it's tired,
And put it up for the night on an old camp-bed.
And ask about that
malachite frog.

¹² THE FACE BEHIND THE FACE, by *Yevgeny Yevtushenko*, translated by *Arthur Boyars* and *Simon Franklin*. Marek. \$10.00; NOSTALGIA FOR THE PRESENT, by *Andrei Voznesensky*, edited by *Vera Dunham* and *Max Hayward*. Doubleday. \$10.00.

have to have notes and commentary before they can be really put together. Unlike "Snow in Tokyo," this is a story-telling whose parts surpass the whole.

"I must learn Russian one of these days," as Browning did not quite say. I have a feeling of inadequacy, of not having done justice to either of these poets, or their translators. Or perhaps to my other poets. This chronicle is mostly just a sampling, an indication of what is there. Go read.

Notes on Contributors

JUDITH HEMSCHMEYER has published two collections of poetry with Wesleyan University Press, *I Remember the Room Was Filled with Light* in 1973 and *Very Close and Very Slow* in 1975. With Anne Wilkinson, she is translating the poetry of Anna Akhmatova.

BARBARA REID* has published stories, children's books and a novella, and has recently completed a first novel under a grant from the Mary Roberts Rinehart Foundation.

The poem in this issue will be included in LAURENCE LIEBERMAN's collection, *God's Measurements*, forthcoming from Macmillan Co. A collection of essays and reviews, entitled *Unassigned Frequencies: American Poetry in Review (1964-77)*, was recently published by the University of Illinois Press.

An Advisory Editor of this Review, WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD is publishing a book with Oxford University Press entitled *Lives of the Modern Poets*, in which his essay in this issue will be included.

EMILY GROSHOLZ's* poetry, fiction and criticism have appeared in several

magazines. This fall, she will begin teaching as assistant professor of Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University.

LEWIS TURCO is Director of the Program in Writing Arts at the State University of New York—Oswego.

A 1974 graduate of Yale University, PATRICIA SHEPPARD is currently in her last year of law school at the University of Iowa.

The Johns Hopkins University Press has recently brought out GUY DAVENPORT's *Da Vinci's Bicycle*; several of the stories in this collection were first published in this Review.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE's translation of *The Four Gospels and the Revelation* was recently published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

DAVID BROMWICH teaches English at Princeton University.

The most recent collection of poems by ALFRED CORN* was *A Call in the Midst of the Crowd* (Viking). A new collection, *The Various Light*, will appear next year.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

DAVID BROMWICH

Answer, Heavenly Muse, Yes or No

“GIVE ME *tact*,” said James Merrill, at a very young age, to the enchantress who shared the servants’ quarters with a cook, a governess, and a tutor. (The enchantress was a one-time guest; the others were regulars, and had been instructed to provide their charge with “local color” from the streets of Istanbul or any of the rich, too rich Eastern cities over whose fallen glamour the poems he wrote as a grown-up would hover comically, elegiacally.) “And— isn’t it the same thing—give me a *perfect ear*.” The enchantress hesitated a moment, sensing in the faintly ridiculous expression a not quite distinct opportunity for a joke or a lesson; but she thought better of it, glanced doubtfully at a list of her other petitioners, and with a sigh, whose meaning none of the servants could possibly have interpreted, granted him both wishes. Since then, the joke she never made has lingered in the poet’s mind, side by side with puzzles and puppies; and it is his fate to gaze long at the disappearing Cheshire Cat’s grin of all questionable phrases, including his own, and show a half-raised eyebrow as a pledge of his self-consciousness. It is a minor wit’s habit, the only such habit in Merrill’s possession. He knows this very well, but loyalty to the enchantress forbids him from altering any detail of what he takes to be her legacy. Besides, he might observe (were he at all inclined to argue), certain of his poems have moved a generation of readers by making it hard to draw the line between manner and mannerism—with their calm deflections, their articulate wish to make something “Out of the life lived, out of the love spent,” their brilliant and serious assurance that every claim they permit themselves is justified, because depths last longer than heights.

Merrill finds all images of himself absorbing: to be lost in the endless refinements of speculation is a destiny full of charm, which he firmly rejects. But the received styles of our period are autobiographical, or “confessional,” and this is the poet in whom the more durable of those styles were unified. Lowell and Jarrell hardly touch the perfect surface of “The Broken Home” or “Lost in Translation”; their first steps seem the relics of an earlier and obsolete technology. In general, Merrill is undervalued by readers who care too much about the obvious fact that he is himself an inventor with a following. His poems are strangely adaptable. They abolish the debts they incur, and shrug off their burdens lightly in the only place where it ought to be done, between the first line and the last. Indeed, his poems do everything lightly; most disputes about them would center on this. He chose, as a mythological subject, not Faustus and Helen but Cupid and Psyche, for whom action cannot go beyond velleity. His sensibility appears to have formed itself wholly on the pains of *curiosa felicitas*, and he is happy to have it appear so.

Our sense of an achieved composure at the center of Merrill’s work has

tended to divert attention from the occasionally insensitive passages in which he seeks, in the record of his own memories, some reflection of the public life of his age. Sudden glimpses, of the Kennedy funeral train in "In Nine Sleep Valley" or of a newspaper photo in "An Urban Convalescence," have come near to ruining at least two fine poems. What Merrill needed was a way to house his public meditations in a sufficiently grand private vehicle. With *The Book of Ephraim* he seemed to have found it, and now we have the sequel, *Mirabell*,¹ and still a third volume is promised to complete the long poem that borrows its scheme of ascent from Dante. This review is accordingly an interim report. It assumes that there is such a thing as poetic character (a different thing from *the* poetic character); that as Merrill looms larger for us it is to this element in him that we are chiefly drawn; and that his character is not, like Stevens', a journeying from strength to strength, or like Hart Crane's, a kind of human miracle that we would prefer not to see "in perspective" even if we could, but rather the compound we recognize in the best of our contemporaries, of weaknesses we can easily ignore with a single emphatic strength we can never forget.

Ephraim and *Mirabell* are about the structure of the universe, and answer the questions Whence? Whither? and How? Two generic voices dominate each of the two parts of the poem. Their names, we feel, ought to be Here and There, but at this point Merrill subdivides. Here may be JM (James Merrill) or DJ (David Jackson, friend and house-mate). There was originally Ephraim, a Greek Jew born in 8 A. D., "a favorite of TIBERIUS." It may now be Mirabell, or Maria Mitsotaki, or W. H. Auden, but with no strict rule against Chester Kallman, Marius Bewley, and any number of others. The truth is that as soon as a friend of the poet's has parked his car to the side of *our* busy thoroughfare, he knocks on the table at Stonington and is affectionately recycled into the poem: all are clubbable. The characters are sufficiently differentiated as to humor but not as to idiom, so that a few simple theatrical cues have to identify them: Auden says "MY DEARS," Maria "MES ENFANTS." Whether the spirits or "patrons," as Merrill calls them, actually used these eminently decipherable salutations, we are never told, but the result is convenient for following the story and only a little tiresome. There appears to be exactly one line of communication from There to Here, and Merrill's interlocutors now and then have the frantic air of collegiate disk jockeys wrestling for a microphone. This, however, is his only *donnée*.

The poetry is of two sorts. First, news of the universe, set up entirely in upper-case lettering, spoken by the voices There. Then, Merrill's observations on the bearing of all this upon his own life. In *Ephraim* the latter predominated, but in *Mirabell* the news itself has become all-important, at the confessed sacrifice of what we would ordinarily call poetry. Most of the book is written in telegraphic capitals which bear the mark not so much of Merrill's poetry as—with many Yr's and U's and Wd's and Shd's—of an accidental effusion by a ticker-tape, a crazed linotypist, several traffic signs, and Ezra Pound in one of the more imposing phases of

¹ MIRABELL: BOOKS OF NUMBER, by *James Merrill*. Atheneum. \$10.95.

his correspondence. Twenty or thirty pages into the poem, the eye grows accustomed to its new habitat, and we come to feel that the wits There are as sure-footed as Here, though more wearing. But granting *Mirabell* its typographical liberties, and reserving all our disappointment at having so much made of Mirabell's turning himself into a peacock out of infatuation with his new friends, which is something everyone has seen happen at a party, we may still suspect that the powers now divide almost too neatly into fancy and imagination. Maria, Auden, Mirabell, perhaps even DJ, who is too dimly seen for us to believe that he subsists entirely on this side of the ouija board, all are clever beyond our abilities and our needs, but none could have written the little poem beginning "No, no! Set in our ways/ As in a garden's," the crown jewel of *Ephraim*. Nor could they have imagined the sonnet about Avebury from the notably this-worldly first book of *Mirabell*.

Within a "greater circle" (the whole myth
Dwarfed by its grass-green skyline) stand
Two lesser, not quite tangent O's
Plotted monolith by monolith.

Two lenses now, whose once outripling arcs
Draw things back into focus. Round each stone
(As earth revolves, or a sheepdog barks)
Rumination turns the green to white.

It's both a holy and a homely site
Slowlier perfused than eye can see
(Whenever the stones blink a century
Blacks out) by this vague track
Of brick and thatch and birdsong any June
Galactic pollen will have overstrewn.

It might be said that without the larger fiction of the entire poem this moment would be lost, and quite impossible to place. And it is true that a phrase like "galactic pollen" withholds its proper meaning unless we have kept up with JM's eccentric discoveries about Akhnaton, nuclear energy, the Bermuda Triangle, and the acquaintance of an immortal patron with his *First Poems*, any of which on its own merits we would gladly tie to a stone and sink deep in the Euphrates. Our regret, however, has nothing to do with the argument of the poem, by which only camp-followers or pedants would pretend to judge it, but everything to do with its gradually narrowing sympathies, and the consequent tendency to allow fewer and more modest occasions of human eloquence, while the prattle of patrons increases in both volume and ambition. Merrill is by nature suggestible to the point of simple faith, and in *Mirabell* he takes his full swing. Part of this is of course the buoyancy of Wilde, but we could wish it had been tempered, as for Wilde it generally was, with a little more of the heritage of Wordsworth. As it is, a voice from There burbles "Leave for Cape Wrath

tonight!" and the auditor Here does leave, without ruffling a map or consoling his neighbors.

Like its predecessor, *Mirabell* is centrally furnished not only with the ouija board and makeshift indicators, but also with a mirror. The board and mirror by themselves, we remember, generated two impressive poems in an earlier volume, *The Country of a Thousand Years of Peace*; and both poems now make curious reading, for what they tell of the inward evolution and specialization of Merrill's interest in the esoteric. The mirror once refused to *teach us how to live*, but still felt a tug of vulnerability in the voices of the world's children, which could be heard wondering aloud, *If not you, who will?* Refusing a mirror's responsibilities in their full Elizabethan sense, it knew what help could come of arrangement alone and kept up appearances with a partly moral purpose of instruction. But the mirror has now become merely an adjunct to the board; and the board, loved at first (in "Voices from the Other World")

Because, once looked at lit
By the cold reflections of the dead
Risen extinct but irresistible,
Our lives have never seemed more full, more real,
Nor the full moon more quick to chill

—this capricious medium is now to be loved in itself, and perhaps all the more because it makes our world *less* real. Throughout *Ephraim* the voices were overheard as splendid possibles, which drew from Merrill a luminous attentiveness to the particulars of "Our life, our life, our life." The pathos of skepticism having departed, we are left with the dark religions of the wandering teacup, a long way from "the very world, which is the world/ Of all of us."

—This outside world, our fictive darkness more
And more belittles to a safety door
Left open onto light. Too small, too far
To help. The blind bright spot of where we are.

Even more grimly chastened, later in the poem, Merrill confesses: "Dear Mirabell, words fail us. But for you,/ How small our lives would be, how tedious." It is the photographic negative of the poem written twenty years earlier. In between, the autobiographical quest which looked as if it would yield the story of a supreme fiction, several times as long as Stevens' poem and miraculously no less personal, has, with its *longueurs*, its trial-and-error cosmogony and important messages from important friends, come more and more plainly to resemble the typical long poems of our time, *Paterson* and *The Cantos*.

Where, in *Ephraim*, the wish for systematic salvation was the gentlest rustling of an angel, candid and calm, never bent on giddy transcriptions, in *Mirabell* there is a panic rush and waste, an earnestness that is really the reverse of *Nil admirari*. Everything must be set down immediately. This urgency is akin to that of the tabloids, with the same profusion of upper-

case lettering. Once, Merrill had a store of negative capability; now, his spirits do not!—and they are running the show. It would be less troubling if the mirror did something other than duplicate. It cannot. Merrill looks up there and finds—exactly what he has down here: a very cosy, comfy place for a seventy year lay-over, filled with the gossip of friends, the vigilance of easy and uneasy relations; a little by-chamber of infinity, built by Time and Matter and the God Biology, but upholstered in the finest taste. Johnson thought the good and evil of eternity too ponderous for the wings of wit. Merrill's wit is a little flattering, a little light, and airy, to be employed on the good and evil of eternity. He is in fact everything he calls Auden, and derides him for (less gently than he evidently supposes). He reveals *sub specie aeternitatis* that Auden's besetting flaw was "THE MIS-MARRIAGE /OF LYRIC TO BALD FARCE." No patron was required to tell us this—yet before passing it on, Merrill should have heeded the admonitions of an *unfamiliar* ghost, named Tu Quoque. The boldest upper-case sections of *Mirabell* are farce too far advanced to admit the lyric impulse. The most moving, on the other hand, like Number 8.9 beginning with "WE MET ON THIS FAIR FIELD & SEEM BY ITS EASE TO BE/ IN CONVERSE"—are pure Auden.

All objections to the symbolism of *Mirabell* Merrill has nicely met by anticipation. Robert Morse, "Closest of summer friends in Stonington," reminds the by then thoroughly indoctrinated and cauldron-stirring players that "Everything in Dante knew its place./ In this guidebook of yours, how do you tell/ Up from down? Is Heaven's interface/ What your new friends tactfully don't call Hell?/ Splendid as metaphor. The real no-no/ Is jargon, falling back on terms that smell/ Just a touch fishy when the tide is low." An equally telling criticism was floated in *Ephraim*, where an analyst hearing the adventure of DJ and JM unshockably classified it as *folie à deux*, and asked the poet himself to supply the motive. To which JM replied: "Somewhere a Father Figure shakes his rod/ At sons who have not sired a child?/ Through our own spirit we can both proclaim/ And shuffle off the blame/ For how we live." Merrill can be, when he chooses to be, not less exquisite in sobriety than in extravagance. But this turns out to be one of the ruses by which from time to time he recites an unflattering sentence against himself, in order to be freed for further indulgences; and in *Mirabell* we are invited to share, with who knows what mingled emotions, an especially awkward siege of aesthetic bigotry: DJ wonders, "Are we more usable than Yeats or Hugo,/ Doters on women, who then went ahead/ To doctor everything their voices said?" And JM replies, in a great many punning words, Yes: reproductive man has squandered his mind on sex, so that only "the docile takers-in of seed" remain as undissolved intellect. We leave it to the Archangel Michael, in Part Three, to say why the metaphor is corrupt.

The ouija board ought to be regarded as an object of experience rather than belief. We would then criticize its products not on scientific grounds but because, in *Mirabell*, they represent an arbitrarily selective range of experience. These table-rappings have become what schoolchildren call a *closed game*—something they get when all the players are there and nobody else can join. Almost any irregularity can still be introduced without

bringing the game to an end; on the contrary, this is when the play-makers really take control; it ceases to be a game and becomes a ritual of identification. *Mirabell* exhibits the obscure but powerful system of hierarchies proper to any such ritual. Because the rules are secret, Merrill's patrons are always divulging more than they realize, and getting into trouble.

Peacock, what's wrong?

I AM HERE I AM MORE CAREFUL

Poor darling, were you punished?

WE MUST GO ON

The poem grows more exacting of its ceremony in proportion as it grows more distraught in the pursuit of mystery. But the resolve that William James found a condition of genuine belief—"It favors gravity, not pertness; it says 'hush' to all vain chatter and smart wit"—is as far from the scene as Ephraim's poignant irony: "Must *everything* be witty? AH MY DEARS/ I AM NOT LAUGHING I WILL SIMPLY NOT SHED TEARS." Memories from actual life, like the dog hit by a car at Number 9.5, are put into the poem as honest encumbrances, but they are not understood. We have stayed too long in the theatre.

In much of his enterprise Merrill resembles Cocteau's Orpheus, who writes down the numerical sequences broadcast by the "unknown station" of the car radio, and keeps Eurydice in check with the words, "How does one know what's poetry and what isn't?" (But it is Cegeste, the inferior poet, too clumsy to be entrusted with walking through mirrors, who has been inventing the messages all along and transmitting them from Eurydice's bedroom.) This review may nevertheless be the work of a peevish empiric: it certainly omits the charm of *Mirabell*, especially in the first half, on which others have preferred to dwell. On one point the poem as we have it is consistent throughout. It is radiant with self-confidence. Merrill may have a surprise for us at the bottom of his cup, and anything is possible to the author of a dozen small masterpieces and an unclassifiable but perfect something, *The (Diblos) Notebook*. His example, in spite of the jungle of complications, is invigorating; and there are other signs that we are entering a period congenial to the long poem: Daryl Hine's *In and Out* and John Hollander's *Reflections on Espionage* both come to mind. These poets have nothing in common except genius and an editor—together with the ability to make irritables melt away, and perhaps the conviction that the language of the cultural entrepreneur may no longer be adequate to the demands of a poem. Merrill's enchantress incidentally brought him the gift of apt quotation, and, confronted with the familiar line of Francis Bacon at the end of the last paragraph, he might respond with a less familiar one: "For if a man can be partaker of God's theatre, he shall likewise be partaker of God's rest."

ALFRED CORN

Radical Continuities

MEYER SCHAPIRO¹ is among the best art historians and theorists of recent times. Unlike most of his colleagues, he has from the beginning of his career taken an active, even a polemical role in the developing art of his day, through his teaching and his persuasive writings. The earliest of these essays, "The Nature of Abstract Art," was published in 1937. Along with Alfred H. Barr's *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936) and John Graham's *System and Dialectics of Art* (1937), it must be counted as one of the few important early documents in English offering testimony in behalf of the new abstracting art of this century. We keep, nowadays, to a narrower definition of abstraction than was current in the thirties. Then, the general rubric was commonly applied to movements as diverse as Malevich's Suprematism, to Futurism, Cubism, Orphism, the short-lived Synchromist painting, and even the symbolizing Surrealism of the thirties. The central distinction to be made within the broad movement of twentieth-century abstracting art is between those artists who maintain some representing relationship to natural forms and those who invent, through paint, forms not found in visible nature. The second group has had more difficulty in finding acceptance than the first, and it is their art that Schapiro is primarily concerned with.

To read his first essay on abstract art in the best light, one must call to mind what was happening in America when it was written. By the mid-thirties serious American artists had polarized over the question of abstraction. Its detractors included those who maintained that abstraction had already run its course over the previous two decades, and that a return to image-painting was the only means of bringing freshness back to new art. The position was given a vehement moral coloring by some of the "American Scene" painters, notably Thomas Hart Benton, who denounced abstraction as decadent, un-American, and degenerate. (He thereby replicated, purposely or incidentally, the views behind Nazi Germany's notorious "Degenerate Art" exhibition of 1936, which included specimen work from most of the art movements mentioned above.) Other attacks on abstract art came from the growing numbers of socially-conscious, Marxist, or Communist artists, who, in the climate of Depression and in the face of the spread of Fascism in Europe, asserted that art must become politically engaged, and that only representational art could embody persuasive political content. Reacting to these varied attacks, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. mounted in 1936 a survey exhibition, "Cubist and Abstract Art," at the Museum of Modern Art, published his polemical book on the subject, and was a benevolent witness of the formation of the American Abstract Artists group.

¹ MODERN ART: 19th and 20th Centuries, Selected Papers, Vol. II, by Meyer Schapiro. Braziller. \$20.00.

Schapiro's "The Nature of Abstract Art," published in *The Marxist Quarterly*, takes a mediating stance. Admitting the importance of historical and social forces, he will not accept "mechanical theories of exhaustion, boredom and reaction" as adequate explanations of why artists adopt new styles, whether abstract or representational. He also denies that there is a complete divorce between the two approaches to painting: "All renderings of objects, no matter how exact they seem, even photographs, proceed from values, methods and viewpoints which somehow shape the image and often determine its contents. On the other hand, there is no 'pure art,' unconditioned by experience; all fantasy and formal construction, even the random scribbling of the hand, are shaped by experience and by nonaesthetic concerns." The argument gains strength from Schapiro's instancing of the history of Impressionism, which was condemned by unsympathetic contemporaries as unrealistic, and by post-Impressionist abstracting painters as "mere photographs of sunshine." Neither view is correct. Embattled contemporary artists would do well to consider the history of their art before adopting untenable positions.

On the other hand, Schapiro sidesteps the question of the political role either of abstract or non-abstract painting. Marxist to the extent of seeing a demonstrable relationship between historical forces and the characteristic art of an era, he makes no pronouncements about the possible political efficacy of art works. Apparently he does not judge it to be a central concern in art. He does suggest, though, that abstract art, at a remote level, has moral (thus perhaps more remotely still, political) implications: it belongs to a temper of freedom and spontaneity.

If today an abstract painter seems to draw like a child or a madman, it is not because he is childish or mad. He has come to value as qualities related to his own goals of imaginative freedom the passionless spontaneity and technical insouciance of the child, who creates for himself alone, without the pressure of adult responsibility and practical adjustments. And similarly, the resemblance to psychopathic art, which is only approximate and usually independent of a conscious imitation, rests on their common freedom of fantasy, uncontrolled by reference to an external physical and social world. By this very practice of abstract art, in which forms are improvised and deliberately distorted or obscured, the painter opens the field to the suggestions of his repressed interior life.

This theme is carried over into a later essay, "Recent Abstract Painting," first published in 1957 under the title "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art." The kind of abstract art in question here, obviously, is the New York School of abstract expressionism, at its apogee in the mid-fifties. If new concerns such as the role of the unforeseen and accidental as aesthetic quantities are brought into the foreground of this essay, it is still the *continuities* between abstract expressionism and older art that Schapiro emphasizes. What the new art shares with the old is, again, this relish for freedom and individuality, which should not be confused with decadence or chaos. In nineteenth-century France, "... the many conflicting move-

ments and reactions, and the great number of distinct personalities, appear to us less as signs of weakness in the culture than as examples of freedom, individuality and sincerity of expression. These qualities corresponded to important emerging values in the social and political life of that period, and even helped to sustain them."

Plausible enough; but from there he goes on to make the startling assertion that the modern artist does not *wish* to communicate easily and efficiently. Rapid and even coercive communication has been taken over by contemporary media, especially TV; and the modern artist will dissociate himself as sharply as possible from this abuse of the communicating act: "The artist does not wish to create a work in which he transmits an already prepared and complete message to a relatively indifferent and impersonal receiver. The painter aims rather at such a quality of the whole that, unless you achieve the proper set of mind and feeling towards it, you will not experience anything of it at all." What does the assertion recall but Jesus' strange justification for teaching in parables, as reported in the Gospel of Mark? That it is a way of reserving the truth for those who deserve it; those who don't understand don't merit salvation.

The quasi-religious fervor of the abstract expressionists lent the movement much of its strength, of course. Schapiro, not religious in any denominational sense, has still always been drawn to art with spiritual dimensions, in particular Byzantine and Romanesque. (His *Romanesque Art*, Volume I in his *Selected Papers*, has already been published, and the Byzantine volume is forthcoming.) The spiritual and moral concerns of abstract expressionism no doubt account for much of his interest in it—hence the third essay collected, called "The Humanity of Abstract Painting." It was published first in 1960, when such concerns were coming to seem old-fashioned, replaced on the one hand by the satirical bite of Pop and, on the other, the cool impersonality of color-field and minimalist painting.

The latest essay in this collection (written in 1971 and recast in 1978) is not about either of these movements: Schapiro probably has little sympathy with them. Instead, we have a long essay on Mondrian, a cool and "minimal" artist surely, but perhaps something more than that, too. Schapiro takes pains to establish precedents for Mondrian's geometrizing art of horizontals and verticals, his primary palette plus black and white. Do Saenredam's architectural canvases of the seventeenth century point to a permanent geometrizing element in the Dutch temperament, carried to its logical, Cartesian conclusion by Mondrian? Should Monet's *Poplars*—four centered parallel verticals—be considered as forerunners in the move to simplify and minimize, as perfected by Mondrian? And are the super-subtle variations in line arrangement and thickness, the thoughtful placement of blocks of primary color adequate vehicles for emotion in painting as it has been traditionally known? Schapiro argues forcefully for these propositions; and he is persuasive and eloquent about that uncharacteristic late work *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, describing it as "a captivating pictorial equivalent of the stirring rhythms and sounds of the mid-Manhattan scene. . . . Mondrian was never more free and colorful and closer to the city spectacle in its double aspect of the architectural as an

endless construction of repeated regular units and of the random in the perpetual movement of people, traffic, and flashing lights."

One not merely incidental value of this collection is the sense offered of an already considerable tradition for experimental art. Spanning seven decades, abstraction is now a venerable fixture in twentieth-century artistic consciousness. When Schapiro changed the title of the essay mentioned above from "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art" to "Recent Abstract Painting," he underlined something that may or may not be generally apparent: whether or not abstract art continues to be done (and it most likely will), it can no longer be considered avant-garde. The "advance-guard" metaphor, along with the pioneering or travel-into-the-future metaphor must be dropped. Abstraction is no longer new, insurgent, or unprecedented; nor is image-painting obsolescent. It now seems certain that image-painting close or remote from naturalistic rendering will continue to be practiced *simultaneously* with abstraction of various kinds. Neither can be considered as more "forward" in time. What has become striking at present is the interdependence of the two modes. Just as atonal music depends, for much of its special impact, on the concurrent presence of vernacular and classical tonal music from which it differs, abstract art registers most powerfully when played off a continuing tradition of image-painting—it offers ways of seeing specifically variant to concurrent imagery. It is also clear that recent image-painting has taken the abstract tradition into account, borrowing insights from it and adapting them in new styles of illusionism; there is no reason to doubt that it will continue to do so.

This observation, however, is not explicitly made in Schapiro's essays, though perhaps it can be inferred from them. Nor should the impression be given that the bulk of this collection is devoted to abstraction and the theoretical issues surrounding it. In addition to the three essays on abstraction, and one on Mondrian, there is a brief examination of the career of Arshile Gorky (who did not always paint abstractions), on Chagall's Bible illustrations, an essay on Picasso's *Woman with a Fan*, and a discussion on the effect on American Art of the 1912 Armory Show, which included, in fact, only a small percentage of imageless painting. The rest of the volume—its first half, actually—is concerned with nineteenth-century School of Paris painters from Courbet to Cézanne.

These essays, most written fairly late in Schapiro's career, will have had little influence on the development of contemporary art; and might, therefore, be considered of less importance. At the same time, they are less speculative, wider in cultural reference, richer in implication, and, probably, more interesting than the essays on abstraction to those who care for painting but who are not themselves professionally involved in contemporary art.

The earliest, "Courbet and Popular Imagery," published in 1941, is a model art-history essay, clearly written, filled with facts, original, and convincing. It presents a pointed and nuanced view of the overlapping political and artistic developments in France from 1850 to 1870. Schapiro has found the moment in history when many of the abiding themes of

modernism first announced themselves—the “proletarian” dismantling of traditional religious and mythological iconography in favor of the naturalistic portrayal of actual life, especially that of the lower classes; the discovery of the beauty and power of non-Western “primitive” art; and the exalting of the naïve, innocent vision of the child as a source for new artistic insights. Two exemplary (and divergent) careers are traced. The first is, of course, Courbet’s itself—his proletarian sympathies, his opting for “realism,” both as a political and an aesthetic value, and his ultimate evolution toward the subject matter of reflective revery. The second career described is that of a writer now mostly forgotten, Champfleury, who because of his attraction to the life and artistic productions of the lower classes at first seemed inclined to share in Courbet’s revolutionary politics. With the passage of time and the firm entrenchment of the Second Empire, his views shifted to the far right, still keeping his interest in popular life and art. Peasants came to represent for him those eternal virtues of strength and endurance beside which mere political autonomy was negligible: their fate contained its own sufficient compensation. (It was along the same lines, of course, that nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals polarized over serfdom, some pointing to the peasants as positive evidence that society must be radically altered, others—Tolstoy, notably—insisting on peasant virtue as proof that society must remain much as it was, this virtue preserved and then propagated among those capable of acquiring it.)

In developing his portrait of Courbet against the background of the Second Empire, Schapiro manages to call up most of the significant artistic figures of the time—George Sand, Gautier, Baudelaire, others—with a brief sketching in of political and aesthetic allegiances. The essay is then illuminating not only for the case of Courbet but for French culture at large. Courbet’s great *Atelier* (which the artist termed an “*Allégorie réelle*”), with its meaningful assembled presences—among them Champfleury, Baudelaire, and *two* children, one watching Courbet paint, the other sprawled on the floor, drawing—emerges as a captivating summary of what was new and important at the time—really, the portrait of an art-historical moment.

To discuss Schapiro’s essays on Cézanne last may help underline the fact that they contain some of his finest writing. He himself has placed them first in the volume, before the Courbet essay, which was, moreover, published earlier than they. Their titles are: “The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life,” “Cézanne,” and “Cézanne as a Watercolorist.” The first takes as a point of departure a painting that used to be called *The Judgment of Paris* and argues that this is a misnomer: the painting would actually represent a miscellaneous pastoral scene with the traditional “gallant” presentation of apples. Literary precedents from Virgil and Propertius are cited; there is every likelihood that Cézanne had the Latin poets (whom he read) in mind when he painted the picture. More than simply revising a title, the essay wishes to suggest possible psychological and erotic connotations of apples for Cézanne, and to begin to account for their frequent presence in his still-lives. Schapiro skillfully out-

lines a psychohistory of Cézanne; the vagaries of his friendship with Zola, erotic complexities in his relationships with women, his sensual fixation on physical *rondeurs*—all this is handled with care and discernment.

Ultimately the essay is a meditation on the nature, importance, and variety of still-life in painting, offering a justification, perhaps, to those among us whose instinct is to qualify, say, Chardin's still-lives as great, but who hesitate to do so. The essay closes with an affecting summary of the importance of still-life in Cézanne's developing color-sense: "Cézanne made of color—the principle of art allied to sensuality and pathos in romantic painting but undeveloped in his own early pictures of passion—the beautiful substance of stable, solid object-forms and a deeply coherent structure of the composition. It is extremely doubtful that he could have reached this goal had he followed Delacroix in his choice of subjects. But in the self-chastening process, the painting of still-life—as latent symbol and intimate tangible reality—was, perhaps more than his other themes, a bridge between his earlier and his later art."

In line with this observation is Schapiro's high estimate of Cézanne's watercolors in the essay listed above. Here he manages to convey the special appeal of these works, their rare, frail magic—something many have felt but no one before has succeeded in describing as beautifully. The values touched lightly on, in this and others of the essays, some purely painterly, others consonant with the wide traditional discipline of humane thought, ought to guarantee for Meyer Schapiro a readership beyond professional art-history circles. As a sample of Schapiro at his best, as an inducement and conclusion, then, the final paragraph of the watercolor essay:

So the diluted color evoked in Cézanne a poetic vision that otherwise might have found no place in his work. There is a genius of his watercolors other than the genius of his oils—perhaps it is better to speak of a temperament attuned to particular perceptions. The watercolors have a special fineness that seems to result from the medium in concert with a sensitivity it has awakened to the immaterial and delicate. In watercolor are realized more distinctly the light and tender in his own being. The same motif transported to the canvas and filled out to the edges, appears robust and solid. While masterful in execution, the painting in transparent tones with unfilled ground is free from the will to power in art, with its struggle for strength and completeness—the ruin of many artists—and is nearer to sensibility, spontaneous and joyful in its momentary attunement.

GILBERTO PEREZ

Fiction Chronicle

DIRTY IS THE NAME OF A WOMAN (or rather the nickname, short for Dorothea) who is a central character in Georges Bataille's *Blue of Noon*.¹ "I have never had any woman more beautiful or exciting than Dirty," asserts the male narrator, but what really enthralls him is not so much the woman as the condition of defilement: Dirty is exciting not because she's beautiful but because she's dirty—because, being beautiful, she can become all the more alarmingly dirty. ("Beauty is desired in order that it may be befouled," Bataille has written elsewhere.) Like a character in a fairy tale or in certain kinds of comedy, she's named after a quality she embodies. Indeed *Blue of Noon* could be regarded as a kind of black comedy, or as a degraded fairy tale.

This may seem like a roundabout way of saying that *Blue of Noon* is a dirty book. Bataille is probably best known for his *Story of the Eye*,² a pornographic novel first published in 1928 under a pseudonym and not under his own name until after his death in 1962. (It came out in English translation only last year, followed now by *Blue of Noon*, which he wrote in 1935 but didn't see fit to have published until 1957. More of Bataille's work, fiction as well as essays and studies, is to appear in English in the future.) *Story of the Eye*, even by the permissive standards of today, remains intractably scandalous in its sexual content; but *Blue of Noon*, although described on the dust jacket as a "classic work of French eroticism," contains only one passage of sustained and consummated sexuality. Yet it's certainly unwholesome, and in its way quite as outrageous as the earlier book; I'll not quarrel about terminology if anyone should insist on calling it pornographic.

Moral considerations aside, both books share with standard pornography two formal characteristics: the depersonalization of the characters, the disconnectedness of the plot. *Story of the Eye* is narrated by an unnamed adolescent boy, *Blue of Noon* by a young man given a name but hardly ever called by it: in both cases the effect is of an anonymous male "I." Obsessed as he is with Dirty, the narrator of *Blue of Noon* doesn't bother to describe her in any detail, and at one point can't even remember what she looks like:

I tried to remember Dirty's face—the beclouded expression of her face. My memory eluded me. I thought, she looks like Lotte Lenya; but the memory of Lotte Lenya in turn eluded me. I only remembered Lotte Lenya in *Mahagonny*. . . . She was tall and slender. I also remembered

¹ BLUE OF NOON, by Georges Bataille. Translated by Harry Mathews. Urizen Books. \$6.95.

² STORY OF THE EYE, by Georges Bataille. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel. Urizen Books. \$5.95.

her being red-haired. In any event, she was captivating. But the facial expression eluded me. . . .

We don't get much more information than this about the individuality of any of the characters in either book. Nor do we get, in either case, a logically unfolding succession of events: instead both books proceed as a string of far-fetched situations. "The possibilities of life," Bataille baldly states in a foreword to *Blue of Noon*, ". . . are those of excess." At a bullfight in *Story of the Eye*, the heroine is served a bull's raw testicles on a plate: "two peeled balls, glands the size and shape of eggs, and of a pearly whiteness, faintly bloodshot, like the globe of an eye." She bites into one of them and then inserts the other into her vulva, reaching orgasm at the very moment when, in the arena, the bull gores the matador's right eye, leaving it dangling from its socket. One revolting incident is not enough: the principle of excess demands two simultaneously. And demands more: after this scene a still more excessive one takes place at a church in Seville. *Story of the Eye* builds a crescendo of debauchery, desecration, sexually charged violence: it conveys the horrifying sense that there can never be enough.

Although excess is common to all dirty books, it can't be denied that Bataille—like his obvious predecessor, the Marquis de Sade—pursues it with exceptional tenacity and into regions few pornographers would dare approach. Yet what truly sets him apart, from Sade as well as from the ordinary product, is the way that in his books he succeeds in combining the principle of excess with its opposite, with economy of means. In the scene at the bullfight, for example, the bull's testicles and the matador's eye are manifestly the same image, an image which gives *Story of the Eye* its title and which recurs throughout it, with variations: eyes, eggs, balls. This is an elementary, even childlike, formal principle, paradoxically applied to the immoderate subject matter—rather as if a man were giving vent to his frenzy by trying to draw geometrically perfect circles. But through this kind of strategy Bataille manages to follow out an obsession concisely and coherently: he gives an artful rendition of abandon. Roland Barthes, in a perceptive if a bit pedantic essay on *Story of the Eye*, goes so far as to treat the book as if it were an exercise in pure form—which is going too far, surely, but the formal design of the book lends itself to this sort of treatment. Barthes points out the continual correspondences being established among various objects through Bataille's use of the oval shape and of such other simple attributes as moistness and softness.

Blue of Noon begins more or less at the point where *Story of the Eye* leaves off: with the narrator having gone, we feel, through all conceivable debaucheries. At this point the narrator is confronted with his own death, which he identifies with the figure of the Commendatore in *Don Giovanni*. (The church which provides the setting for the worst episode in *Story of the Eye* is said to be the burial place of Don Juan.) Death, for Bataille as for Sade and others in this sex-and-death tradition, constitutes both the ultimate erotic experience and the fearful punishment for eroticism. In *Blue of Noon*, however, the profligate at the end of his tether becomes somehow

equated with the doom impending over Europe in 1935. When, for example, Dirty goes off leaving the narrator feeling suicidal in Vienna, he looks out from a window he might jump out of and sees a black streamer flapping in the wind, a streamer raised in honor of the assassinated Dollfuss and seeming to the narrator "like a stream of ink flowing across the clouds." The European situation looms on him like a darkening mess, much like the squalid, rat-infested London cellar where, dead drunk and sprawled among derelicts, he and Dirty have landed, at the book's opening, "in pursuit of some grim response to the grimmest of compulsions."

Such pictures of filth dominate the book, and are set in contrast with the blue of the noon sky, a brightness which the narrator recalls in the dark of night during a revolt in Barcelona, an intense blue which turns into blood red with the eyes shut: "When I was a boy, I loved the sun; I used to shut my eyes and let it shine redly through my lids. The sun was fantastic—it evoked dreams of explosion." (The hot sun of Seville turns into one of the avatars of the eye in the earlier book.) Like *Story of the Eye*, *Blue of Noon* is built around elementary images, the bright blueness of the sky as against the sordidness of Dirty or the repulsiveness of Lazare, a Communist woman whom the narrator helps out with money and describes as "ugly and conspicuously filthy":

I remembered that, as a child, I was as dirty as Lazare. The memory was painful. I recalled one depressing moment. . . I had grasped my pen and, holding it in my clenched right hand like a knife, I repeatedly buried the steel nib in the back of my left hand and forearm. . . I inflicted a number of dirty cuts, more blackish than red because of the ink. . .

Blue, red, black, mostly black: such images, indeed childlike, don't make sense of the experiences they refer to in the adult world. Lazare's ugliness can have little to do with the validity of her Communism, or the narrator's personal dissipation with the plight of Europe. Yet, within the context of instinctual correspondences Bataille has established, his images don't have to make that kind of sense. It is sufficient that the narrator should associate the filthy, black-clad Lazare with that inky streamer in Vienna, or a starry night in strife-torn Barcelona (which makes him think of the blue of noon) with the flickering of a myriad candles in a graveyard in Nazi Germany (which arouses him and Dirty to a passionate copulation in the mud). I wouldn't go to Bataille for explanations, but he does provide one with indelible interconnected impressions.

The childlike quality in Bataille seems to me indicative of what his fiction truly has in common with the fairy tale. His gift is not exactly for description, since he never goes into much detail (which, considering his subject matter, is a good thing). But he has a gift for visual, sensual, evocation, for the striking sketch. This sketchy vividness resembles the succinct imagery in fairy tales, and has a similar effect in releasing the reader's imagination and enabling the narrative to dispense with the logic of actual events. Think of, say, that moment at the opening of *Snow White*

when the queen pricks her finger and three drops of blood fall in the snow, and compare it with this passage from *Blue of Noon* (in which the narrator has just met the woman in question):

Through her dress I dug the tines of the fork hard into her thigh. She let out a scream and, in her agitated attempts to get away from me, knocked over two glasses of red wine. She pushed back her chair. In order to see the wound, she was obliged to pull up her dress. Her underthings were pretty; I found the nakedness of her thighs attractive. One of the tines, sharper than the others, had pierced the skin. Blood was flowing, but it was a trifling wound. I didn't waste a second; she had no time to prevent my pressing two lips to her thigh and swallowing the few drops of blood I had just drawn. . . .

All pornography, needless to say, has in common with fairy tales the depiction of a fantasy world; the originality of Bataille lies in his giving his fiction a coherence comparable to that of fairy tales by adopting something like their form. *Story of the Eye* and *Blue of Noon* hang together through a pattern of simple but compelling images. The neatness of their form, however, is at odds with their dirty, convulsive content; there is a kind of insolence in Bataille's formal elegance. "Born of disreputable pain," declares the narrator of *Blue of Noon*, "the insolence . . . persists in spite of everything." That unconscionable insolence, that defiance of the worst things imaginable, is ultimately what these two books are all about.

Craig Nova's *Incandescence*³ is a new American novel in a rather similar vein of debasement in the first person. On the cover, illustrating the title, there is a picture of a woman's buttocks, but the narrator of this novel, a young New Yorker named Stargell, has come to such a sorry pass that his own wife refuses to have sex with him. She is, one might say, Dirty's opposite number, obsessed with cleanliness, afraid that germs might get in her underwear. Stargell, when she married him, had seemed to promise a spotless future, but now that he's down on his luck she spends most of her time asleep in bed; when awake, she mainly watches television (she's partial to the detergent commercials) or drinks herself back to sleep. She even goes back to bed, too drunk to eat a special dinner she and her husband have prepared, on the day of her father's arrival in New York on a visit from his home in Greece; her disappointment in her husband was only aggravated by the "dirty money" he had to borrow from a neighborhood loan shark in order to provide her father with amenities on his visit.

Stargell is a bright boy gone to seed. Fired from his job at a think tank, he drives a cab for a while but quits after being robbed by a passenger at gunpoint and finding, on his return to the garage, that another driver has been killed on the job. Death seems always close at hand in this lively yet basically disheartening novel. Stargell's father is dying of cancer in Los Angeles; a derelict friend of Stargell dies at a Bowery bar where, up on the wall, labeled patches of clothing are posted which were collected from

³ INCANDESCENCE, by Craig Nova. Harper & Row. \$9.95.

customers who died there. After he borrows from the loan shark, Stargell himself has reason to fear for his life: unless he pays the money back soon, and with the whopping interest demanded, he stands to face Jack the Ripper, as he calls a brutish hired man who lives downstairs. Although not the death-defying type, Stargell has his own kind of effrontery, as he manifests in his flippant tone of narration. In taking that loan without any prospects for a job, he's clearly asking for trouble, but he seems confident that something will come up, that, smart as he is, he'll think of something.

Incandescence is told in the present tense. Normally the tense of fiction is the past; the present makes for greater immediacy but also for a peculiar unreality, like a dream which seems to be happening now but we know is not. (The present is normally the tense in which we summarize plots, but not things that actually have happened unless we want to exaggerate their drama.) In *Incandescence* the present tense adds to the feeling that all this couldn't really be happening, that Stargell didn't bargain for the muddle his life has become. Getting desperate for a job, he applies for one at an amusement park in Queens impersonating a gorilla; he works himself up for the tryout, and manages very well, with flourishes, the gorilla act; but he needn't have bothered, since the job had been offered in advance to another man with connections at the park. This episode is both funny and painful, an accurate caricature of the sort of humiliation one often undergoes when applying for a job. But the effect of it is limited, as I think the whole book is, by the sensibility discernible behind it of the bright boy griping that this shouldn't have been done *to him*. Stargell does come up with a way to repay the loan, a clever swindling scheme he carries out; but of course this is again asking for trouble, and he ends up caught by the police. I sympathized with his predicament, but got the feeling that he was taking chances not only in desperation but in the belief that somehow the dice ought to be loaded in his favor, as a right due a once promising young man.

The title of John Wain's new novel, *The Pardoner's Tale*,⁴ no doubt alludes to Chaucer's tale about greed. But the greed in Wain's novel is not for money: it's the middle-aged man's perennial quest for the redeeming younger woman. Although of another sort, we have here again fantasies of incandescence entertained in the face of decline. By telling essentially the same story twice over, in alternating chapters devoted to two different middle-aged men, Wain underscores the prevalence of the quest; and he brings out its intrinsic character as a fantasy by having the protagonist of one story be the concocter of the other, notably less plausible one. The less plausible is the story, told in the first person, of Gus Howkins, a Londoner who has broken up his marriage of many years ostensibly because of his wife's infidelity but really because he's bored stiff; on a canoeing trip he takes at the book's opening, a beautiful young woman in need of rescue turns up like some apparition and they spend a loving night together in his rented cottage; but she's gone the next morning. Gus's story

⁴ THE PARDONER'S TALE, by John Wain. Viking. \$10.95.

is a fiction being written by a "thick-set, clumsy man of fifty," a pretty successful novelist ("surveys of contemporary literature always mentioned him") by the name of Giles Hermitage. The novelist's own story, told in the third person, parallels that of the character who shares his initials and addresses the reader in the first person; but the fiction he's writing is not autobiographical. Gus is an unintellectual suburbanite who runs a press-cutting agency; Giles has never been married, and he starts writing about Gus before his own beautiful young woman materializes. Yet the discrepancy between the two situations only makes all the more clear the underlying common pattern. Writing the story of Gus Howkins is for Giles Hermitage "the only way of escape from the anguish and alarm that flooded every cell of his being" after his mistress abruptly left him for another man; and so is his own subsequent involvement with his young woman a way of escape. Gus's reckless pursuit of the woman he met on his canoeing trip, and the ensuing melodramatic complications in the plot Giles has devised, evidently reflect Giles's wish for that kind of excitement in his own life. Moreover, Giles gives Gus's story a happy ending when he concludes that, after all, things are turning out well with his own young woman; but reverses that ending when his own circumstances lead him to reverse that conclusion.

The trouble with this book, I think, is that both Gus's and Giles's stories are too close to naturalistic melodrama for Wain's conception, as I see it, wholly to come off. Perhaps he might have written a better novel had he made the two situations still more discrepant: Gus's more fantastic, Giles's more realistic. But this is a good-natured book, refusing to go to extremes, to make too much either of the middle-aged men's obsession with the young women or of the young women's eventual rejection of the men. It is a pardoner's tale, and that gives it a mellow charm.

The French, however, will have no truck with this kind of soft-headed English warmth. Certainly not the practitioners of the *nouveau roman*, one of whom is Robert Pinget, the author of two recently translated novels (both written about a decade ago), *The Libera me Domine* and *Passacaglia*.⁵ Like other writers associated with that movement, Pinget professes an overriding preoccupation with form: "it is the mold," he states in an author's note to *The Libera*, "which, line by line, makes the pudding." (Bataille, by contrast, maintains in his foreword to *Blue of Noon*: "It has been my aim to express myself clumsily.") Of course the mold Pinget has in mind is not that of a plot. Nothing definite happens in either of these novels: everything is conjectural, suppositious, continually subject to revision. The setting in both cases is rural France, and the way things are told and then retold, over and over again in different versions, could be likened to village gossip. The particular formal problem that has concerned Pinget, as stated in his author's note, has been the rendering, on the written page, of the quality of oral language, the tone of voice of someone speaking.

Endeavoring to approximate what he calls the "evolving syntax" of oral language, in *The Libera* and in most of *Passacaglia* he hasn't written

⁵ *THE LIBERA ME DOMINE*, by Robert Pinget. Translated by Barbara Wright. Red Dust. \$10.50; *PASSACAGLIA*, by Robert Pinget. Translated by Barbara Wright. Red Dust. \$6.95.

sentences but paragraphs (though sometimes no longer than a sentence or phrase) punctuated solely with commas and an occasional three dots until the period (or three dots) at the end of each. After a comma, the statement just made may be taken back, or a different matter broached and then, after another comma, dropped, or a digression begun on some subject that must be expanded on before, comma, returning to the original one, but what was that? This is not a stream of consciousness but, deliberately, of verbiage, full of stock phrases ("such lovely weather," "to cut a long story short"), a bewildering tissue of rumor and speculation which indeed suggests the meanderings of a compulsive gossip who regularly shifts in mid-sentence to something else which it occurs to him might be relevant too but who keeps returning again and again to the same subjects. It's not the same voice that speaks in these two books, the gossip in *The Libera* being more animated and verbose, that in *Passacaglia* more somber and halting; yet they both seem driven to carry on at length only about things they can only conjecture about.

"There is always an *I* in all my books," asserts Pinget, "but it is always a different one." Again he concurs with other recent French writers in his predilection for the first person, and it is usually a depersonalized one. If Bataille's "I" is anonymous, Pinget's is unimaginable: someone who seems to have witnessed nothing at all firsthand, or if he has, to have retained nothing but vague memories compounded with other, contradictory reports. He is like a transcendent gossipmonger whose information is ontologically unreliable—and yet a peculiarly solipsistic one who seems for the most part to be addressing no one but himself. Ordinary village gossip serves to while away the boredom of having little else to do; the busy gossip recountings in these two novels seem to be all that can be done to while away the time between birth and the grave. Despite Pinget's avowed indifference to subject matter, death is obviously a subject that haunts both these narratives. "Death had anticipated all the gossip," says the narrator of *The Libera* in the last of his countless recountings of the village schoolteacher's rumored visit to the local gentry, "and suddenly they had all become silent beneath the plane tree, nothing and nobody any more . . ." Starting out as a divagation into the unsolved case of a strangled little boy—or perhaps he drowned, or was run over by a truck, or perhaps it was another boy—*The Libera me Domine* concludes at "a perfectly ordinary funeral, like mine, like yours," with the villagers chanting the mortuary litany that provides the title. In *Passacaglia* the central situation is a corpse found on a dunghill, and the narrator's account, "that murmur interrupted by silences and hiccups," conveys the impression of a drunkard rehashing possible scenarios for his own death.

It may seem odd for a formalist to choose to mimic the most rambling kind of speech. But Pinget takes advantage of the repetitions characteristic of gossip to organize them into something like a musical form. Mad-deningly incoherent though these books are in their rendering of events, they achieve a coherence of their own, and a strange entrancing beauty, in their verbal embroidery, their network of recurring expressions and incessant variations on the same topics. "The object of *Passacaille*," Pinget is

quoted on the book jacket as saying, "is to exorcise death by magical operations with words. As if the pleasure of playing with the vocabulary could delay the fatal issue." Like Samuel Beckett, reportedly his friend and an evident influence on his work, Pinget appears to hold the view of life as a meaningless excursion on the way to the grave—a view which I can't share, though it may be increasingly hard to argue the contrary; but I can share the pleasure Pinget, and Beckett, take in playing with the vocabulary. Here is an example from *The Libera*, telling once again about the schoolteacher's visit to the gentry:

Old Lorpailleur arrives, the curé is already there, Francine too, Minouche has just deposited her mess and is escaping into the kitchen-garden, Francine gets up and goes to meet the schoolmistress, the latter is in a terrible state and says that a truck et cetera, really fate is very cruel to the poor Ducreuxs, after their little Jean-Claude ten years ago and you know what happened to him now it's their little Louis, will he pull through, they've rushed him to hospital, Mademoiselle Ariane is no less upset than the curé and Francine, she makes old Lorpailleur sit down and one thing leading to another, a finger of port helping her to pull herself together, they talk about atrocities in general, what times we live in . . .

Grim as their outlook on life is, Pinget's books often manage a weird humor, as here, with these people chatting away in clichés about accidents and atrocities, and our being told for the umpteenth time about such trivial details as the finger of port or the cat depositing her mess in front of the guests.

I don't share, either, the belief that all art aspires to the condition of music, or that prose fiction in particular should pursue a realm of pure words and disown its traditional dealings with the world. But Pinget seems instead *resigned* to the condition of music: his patterned verbiage is a way of dealing, as an ironical antidote, with a world he finds irreclaimable. Like Bataille's, this is a form at odds with the content. Although I won't accept the impossibility, I think one must recognize the peculiar difficulty of giving meaning to life in our modern situation—and the validity of such endeavors as Pinget's, or Beckett's, or Bataille's, to wrest form from chaos without presuming to have found ultimate order.

Death, however we may regard it in our own case and that of others, always provides a vantage point for the summation of life. In two recent novels the death of a relative prompts the protagonist to a recapitulation of the past. Bruce Mason, the protagonist of Wallace Stegner's *Recapitulation*,⁶ is an old man, a former ambassador and still a sought-after advisor on Middle-Eastern affairs, who returns to the town of his youth, Salt Lake City, where an aunt has died whose sole surviving relative he is. Although he's a busy man, and was never close to this aunt, he has made the trip for the funeral, by car all the way from San Francisco to the city he hasn't seen in forty-five years. His father, mother and brother have all long been

⁶ RECAPITULATION, by Wallace Stegner. Doubleday. \$8.95.

dead; nor has he, in all this time, been in touch with any of his old friends. Of his life since his departure they could know only the public career, what's been reported in the news; he's back in town as a stranger. So he's puzzled when, on his arrival, he finds that a woman has been trying to contact him; assuming he would be there for the funeral, she left her number at the parlor but not her name. Could this be someone from the distant past, which Bruce Mason had resolutely put behind him but which is beckoning him now? For it's evidently not the aunt's funeral, but the obscure call of that past, that's led him to return to Salt Lake City at this point in his life when he is himself not so far from death.

Recapitulation is a carefully crafted novel, smoothly shifting back and forth between the present and the pieces of the past that surface in Bruce Mason's mind. Almost anything he encounters in his old city can act to trigger his memories, the things that still remain as well as those he finds changed or gone. He recalls his unhappy boyhood with the family he felt ashamed of, the father who was a bootlegger, the suffering supportive mother; recalls the young man whose friendship helped Mason pull himself together in the years of his early manhood; recalls Nola, the love of his life, or so it had seemed back then, before their relationship ended in grief. The present time of Mason's visit is recounted in the past tense; the past of his memories and dreams is sometimes given in the present tense, to correspond to those moments when it becomes especially vivid in his mind. Everything, however, is recounted in the third person: Stegner follows the venerable Jamesian method of third-person narration limited to the consciousness of one person in the story. When, as here, that person is the protagonist, this method serves at once to encase us in his frame of reference—it's his story as it appears to him—and to keep us at a certain distance from him, since he's not the one telling the story.

For me this method, even in some of the master's own longer works, can often become irksome, generating neither sufficient subjectivity nor sufficient detachment. I found Stegner's novel intermittently absorbing but more frequently frustrating in its calculated withholding of information. I wanted to know more about the past than Mason remembers, or would like to remember: not until more than halfway into the book, for example, do we learn that a certain licentious fellow Mason has been recalling with distaste was the man Nola betrayed him with. Nor did I get a clear enough picture of Mason himself, of the satisfactions he must have obtained from his diplomatic career, of the reasons why even now, on this trip into the past, he won't quite come to terms with it. Thinking he ought to get in touch with his old best friend, he looks him up in the phone book and discovers that his number is the same one as that left by the woman who called the funeral parlor; but Mason can't bring himself to call that number back, though we're led to expect he will until the end, when he's relieved of doing so by an assignment from Washington which he gladly accepts. We are to understand that his rushed departure from Salt Lake City parallels his escape from it as a young man, when Nola perhaps had sought a reconciliation with him and he left without speaking to her—as now it was perhaps Nola who called him at the funeral parlor. Still, I wanted to find out who that woman was, and to know more

about Nola, in the present and in the past, than the restrictive compass of Mason's repressive consciousness permits.

What had happened with Nola was bound up with another, still more important relationship in Mason's past. He had virtually invited her seduction by that distasteful fellow, whose vulgarity and coarse masculinity Mason seems to have associated with his own father. It transpires that the relative who, in his mind, Mason has really come back to bury is his hated bootlegger father, long in the grave yet the crucial unresolved figure in his past. But this takes an inordinate length of time in transpiring, and we never learn enough about that father, again because Mason is reluctant to summon him back. Stegner's novel is not a recapitulation but a thwarted attempt at one, thwarted because Bruce Mason would really rather not know; but that's not, in my opinion, a good enough reason why *we* shouldn't.

I much preferred the recapitulation in Elisabeth Plessen's *Such Sad Tidings*.⁷ This first novel by a young German writer also deals with the thoughts and memories induced on a trip to a family funeral, the attempt it occasions to settle accounts with the past. Here also a father is to be buried, but this time in fact as well as in the mind of the protagonist, a young woman named Augusta whom we follow in the course of her driving from Munich to her father's funeral at the country estate in Holstein owned by her aristocratic family. Elisabeth Plessen tends to stick by matters of fact. Road signs, periodically set down, remind us that Augusta's journey is a physical as well as a mental one; the workings of her mind are themselves often introduced with a kind of signpost: "Dream Section," "Seventh attempt to speak with C. A." And they are recounted in a rather impersonal tone, without embellishment, like a list of items laid out for our scrutiny. C. A. was Augusta's father, and she had never found it easy to speak to him: whenever he wasn't withdrawn in his lordly manner, she would usually be critical of the delusions and sentimentalities she detected in his statements. Plessen's novel conducts throughout an examination of language, taking apart, for example, the earnest language of an unfinished book C. A. wrote after the Second World War about his experiences as an officer in the German army. The austerity of the author's own prose suggests a wariness, much like her heroine's, of eloquent expressions, a deep mistrust of the seductions of sentiment. In the case of the German language after the Nazi rhetoric, I need hardly point out the particular appropriateness of such a mistrust. *Such Sad Tidings*, whose original title translates as "Message to the Aristocracy," deals as much with the past of a class, and of a nation, as with the heroine's personal retrospect.

"He's not a writer, don't forget," an aunt had said to her on learning that C. A. had given Augusta his book to read. "He writes the way he thinks." "No," she had replied, "he thinks the way he writes. There are passages that are very honest, very clear. . . . But it's only for a moment, and three lines later the phrases come back, the rote learning, the slogans, the self-deceit." This book was no apology for the Nazis, whom it con-

⁷ *SUCH SAD TIDINGS*, by Elisabeth Plessen. Translated by Ruth Hein. Viking. \$9.95.

demned and whose Führer it called "a criminal from the outset"; it was written by a war-shocked man with no other intention than to come to grips with what he had gone through. And he had shown it to no one but Augusta: for him the book was a private statement which he was now passing on to his daughter in a gesture of fatherly intimacy, hoping that it would make her see better his side of things. "Don't be too hard on him," the aunt had admonished her, but Augusta couldn't abide the phrases and the self-deceit of the heroic posture that persisted through C. A.'s disavowals of the cause he risked his life for. She was merciless in her criticism.

Wasn't she being too hard on him? C. A. was not, after all, a bad sort, but within his limitations a well-meant man, not even so rigid in the aristocratic conservatism which brought him in conflict with his leftist daughter. In his distant way, he had repeatedly shown interest in her views, read literature she suggested, liked to discuss issues with her; he had paid her several visits during the time when she was a student activist in Berlin, and on one occasion, overcoming his reluctance, had consented to meet some of her young radical friends, and had spent an enjoyable evening in their company. Granted, in all his exchanges with Augusta C. A. would sooner or later retreat to his old positions; challenged on the phrases she found so objectionable, he would withdraw into his proud silence; but surely the daughter had been more obdurate than the father in holding to a set of beliefs. We are let into C. A.'s thoughts as Augusta couldn't have known them, though perhaps as she surmised them. The pea soup her friends in Berlin served him, for example: he had told them it was his favorite, but not that it reminded him of the thick soups which provided a relief on the long freezing hunts he secretly hated. Later, we find C. A. alone at the country estate brooding over that evening in Berlin, writing down on his memo pad notes to himself or to the absent Augusta:

Your friends' hostile partisanship. After this he was prepared to consider it as uprightness. Shortly thereafter he found it almost honorable; then, abruptly, honorable to the point of the ridiculous; finally, ungentlemanly to the point of contempt. He underlined *ungentlemanly* . . .

Here again his phrases are criticized—he thinks the way he writes—but we get a sense of the man grappling with his ideas, of the importance he attaches to finding some way of resolving his conflict with his daughter. *Please tell me, what is it you have against me?* he says aloud to his absent daughter, another statement underlined by Plessen, a formula, but nonetheless engaging our sympathy for the man, trapped as he was in his formulas, his conventions, the hated hunts he undertook as his aristocratic duty. In this recapitulation we get a much fuller picture of the father to be buried.

We are led to the conclusion that Augusta indeed had been too hard on a father who, given his background and circumstances, couldn't reasonably have been expected to act much better; but that she needed to be

hard in order to rescue herself from that background and resist the continuation of those circumstances in her own life. There was probably some truth to her younger sister's accusation that Augusta was to blame for their father's untimely death of a heart attack: she had inflicted much suffering on him, and had no doubt exacerbated his alcoholism. And her hardness has also exacted its price on Augusta. She lives alone, as her loneliness on the road serves to reiterate; she seems to have very few close friends, and no warmer a relationship with her lover than she had with her father. Yet, in her view, just as fighting with the Nazis had been for C. A. another aristocratic duty, so do the values he stood for persist in buttressing a hateful system in contemporary Germany. To illustrate her position, she had told C. A. the story of a drunken farmhand on the estate who stole a prized tin of caviar from the kitchen, then "tasted it, only to spit it out promptly . . . and flung the tin into the pond." The moral, she had said to an uncomprehending C. A., is that "he threw away what he did not like." But Augusta, unlike that boor, was raised to the taste of caviar and to the world of privilege it represents: for her to throw away what she did not like required her vigilant intransigence in cutting herself off from that world. The sadness the heroine feels in *Such Sad Tidings* stems more than anything from her realization that what she did to her father, and to herself, had to be done.

The eponymous flounder in Günter Grass's new novel⁸ is the legendary talking fish who made a prominent appearance in the Grimms' fairy tale, "The Fisherman and his Wife." In one episode in *The Flounder* the Grimm brothers discuss with friends which version of this tale they should publish: for its source had been an old woman who told it to one of the group in two contradictory versions, which she maintained were both the truth. In one version it's the fisherman's wife, Ilsebill, who seeks to get more and more wishes granted from the magic flounder her husband had caught and set free; in the other it's the man's overweening ambition that brings about their undoing. Of the group of friends, only the one woman present argued against

the one version in which, so she said, Ilsebill was painted too black. If the tale were published in that form, it would be too easy for men to say: That's how you women are, greedy and quarrelsome, all alike. "When actually," she cried, "women have such a hard time of it!"

"I, on the other hand," said her brother Clemens, "cannot approve of the other tale, which so cruelly demolishes man's strivings and dreams of greatness. None of the things we hold sacred, our rich and complex history, the glorious empire of the Hohenstaufens, the towering Gothic cathedrals, would exist if men had dully contented themselves with what they had . . ."

Of course it was the brother's view that prevailed, although some of the other men argued that both versions should be published. Among many

⁸ THE FLOUNDER, by Günter Grass. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$12.00.

other counts, the Flounder in Grass's novel is charged with having circulated that slanderous misogynistic fairy tale by a tribunal of women who put the talking fish on trial for having promoted over the centuries the cause of male supremacy.

It was "toward the end of the Stone Age . . . on a timeless, partly cloudy day" that the male narrator first caught the Flounder. Or rather, this neolithic fisherman is one of the ancestors with whom Grass's narrator, whose wife in the present day is named Ilsebill, successively identifies himself in the course of the book, an assortment of men who all lived in Pomerania, by the Baltic where the Flounder was first caught. Ever since that day, the talking fish, periodically summoned from the sea, has been giving advice to the men of the region. In the matriarchal times of the Stone Age, the men had been content under the rule of the three-breasted goddess Awa: they were suckled to satiation, three times a day from birth into senectitude, by women who then all had the goddess' triple mammary endowment. But the Flounder thought they were a bunch of milk-sops, as he told the narrator:

Yes, yes, you want those tits. Can't get enough of them. Breast-fed babies to the end of your days. But out in the world the future has started blazing trails. Nature is sick of being submitted to with womanish passivity; it wants to be mastered by men. Trace canals. Drain swamps. Fence in the land, plow it, take possession of it. Beget a son. Hand down property. Your suckling time has lasted two thousand years two long, two thousand years of waste and stagnation. My advice to you: away from the breast. Wean yourselves. That's it, my son, at long last you must wean yourself!

The Flounder kept these backward simpletons informed of the more advanced accomplishments "fostered by male vigor" in other cultures, and prodded the men of Pomerania into gaining mastery over numbers (Awa had outlawed any higher than three), metals, and so on—and eventually, though this took a long time with the pusillanimous Pomeranians, over the women. Having launched them out of pre-history, the knowing flatfish continued to help the men along through their different historical periods, but sometime in the nineteenth century his advice started to flag, and by the twentieth he has apparently come to concur with the view of male ambition in the suppressed version of the fairy tale. For not only does he now advise the narrator to help Ilsebill with the dishes: he attempts to switch allegiances altogether by letting himself be caught a second time, now by three lesbian feminists. But the women won't let him so easily off the hook: instead of setting him free they bring him to trial.

This trial is also tacitly the narrator's: through the ages he has followed the Flounder's teachings, and in his numerous past incarnations he supplies the prosecution with salient evidence of men's mistreatment of women. His account is addressed to his Ilsebill as a kind of plea in his own behalf, in behalf of the men whose various relationships with women he reconstitutes. It was the Flounder who, in the Middle Ages, introduced

the notion of love in a move calculated to subjugate the women to the men; but the narrator, then an ageing swordmaker and the husband allotted to a young woman, himself fell hopelessly in love with a wife devoted only to that other male invention, the cult of Christ. Around the turn of the century, the narrator was both the first and the second husband of a proletarian woman, the first killed in the Franco-Prussian, the second in the First World War, both anchor makers who regularly beat her when drunk, but each a "weepy type, needful of consolation," which she memorably provided by boiling the suicidal nail and rope into a soup:

Never again did Otto Friedrich Stubbe hang himself. But that soup, made from beef bones, a blacksmith's nail, and a calf's tether, with an egg stirred into it for strength, which Lena from then on served up every Saturday as a preventive, soon acquired a reputation among the suicide-prone. Potential dangling men would knock at her door, shyly introduce themselves, and invite themselves to dinner. They got used to the faint taste of hemp. They came again and again. And Lena didn't ask "Why?" but cooked a family-sized potful of nail-and-rope soup for her Saturday table, and got pretty well paid for it.

Like Lena, who wrote a "Proletarian Cook Book" (but never could find a publisher for it), all the women in the narrator's composite past are regarded principally in their role as cooks. Like the primeval three-breasted mother goddess he perhaps shouldn't have strayed from, they provided the sustenance while the men perpetrated the history. The best case the narrator can make for himself is that history has been no kinder to him than to the women.

The woman as cook is not, I suppose, a conception likely to win feminist endorsement. But Grass's novel, with its running commentary on different methods of preparing food over the ages, is a celebration of cooks, and keeps reminding us that the conspiratorial flatfish is also very good to eat. Grass doesn't want the women of today to listen to the Flounder's advice, though he knows that they probably will, and that maybe they should. The resolution of the trial is a flounder feast attended by all the participants; yet the book ends with a young woman talking to the Flounder by the Baltic, carrying on an animated conversation which the narrator overhears but can't understand. It's a sad ending, we feel, such as most of history has come to; but we also recognize that, once initiated on that timeless, partly cloudy neolithic day, the enterprise of history can't be stopped.

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